My Journey to Becoming a Scholar-Teacher

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Introduction

American social psychologist Kurt Lewin’s maxim “there is nothing as practical as a good theory” has influenced me throughout my carrier in academia. Over the past twenty years, I have discovered that good theories are those that are immediate and insightful enough to solve problems that we encounter in our daily lives. As a communication scholar, I research the ethical decision-making process, leadership, and upward influence tactics of public relations practitioners. I navigate how the emergence of social media has contributed to activism and social change. I also explore how storytelling strategies work differently depending on variable conditions, such as the speaker’s credibility, gender bias, and emotional intensity. The theoretical insights I have gained from research have translated into practical implications in the classroom, and it is this that I teach to my students.

What I Teach as a Scholar-Teacher

• My research efforts have served my teaching practice. For example, I led a health promotion project with the Diabetes Self-Management Education (DSME) Program of the Pittsburgh County Public Health Department in 2014. The purpose of the project was to redesign the DSME program’s print marketing materials because they had suffered from decreasing patient enrollment. I involved my campaign class students in the project. Under my supervision, the students followed every step of the systematic research process, which helped students to make evidence-based decisions as they redesigned the brochure. Students then tested the effectiveness of the new brochures.

• This project was presented at the Third Biennial DC Health Communication Conference in 2015 and received an honorable mention award. The DSME program also resulted in improved marketing materials.

Confidence in Telemedicine

I also advise graduate students to complete their research projects.

In spring 2020, I mentored a graduate student, Rachel Griffith to further develop her term paper by refining the research design, collecting data, writing a manuscript, presenting the paper at the Research and Creativity Activity Week (RCAW), and submitting it to a journal. Our work was finally published at Health and New Media Research in July 2021. The whole process required patience and energy. Mentoring student research, however, is the best way to connect research and education. There is pure joy in seeing the student intellectually grow as we go through the research process.

Social Media, Social Support & Mental Health During COVID-19

Another project that I recently published at Frontiers in Health Communication with my graduate student, Kaitlyn Longest is about how social media usage and online/off-line social support affect depression symptoms of the US young adults aged at 18 – 25. (Scan the QR code for the details of the research).

The research found that informational acquisition motive for using social media was positively associated with depression symptoms, and a higher level of online informational support contributed to increasing the symptoms. Young adults showed the lowest level of depression symptoms when they had a higher level of offline emotional support and a lower level of online informational support. Our survey stressed the importance of offline emotional support and reconfirmed that nothing can replace its value.