Teaching Current Directions in Psychological Science

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Aimed at integrating cutting-edge psychological science into the classroom, Teaching Current Directions in Psychological Science offers advice and how-to guidance about teaching a particular area of research or topic in psychological science that has been the focus of an article in the APS journal Current Directions in Psychological Science. Current Directions *is a peer-reviewed bimonthly journal featuring reviews by leading experts covering all of scientific psychology and its applications, and allowing readers to stay apprised of important developments across subfields beyond their areas of expertise. Its articles are written to be accessible to nonexperts, making them ideally suited for use in the classroom.*

Inspiring Interest in Interests
by David G. Myers

Rounds, J., & Su, R. (2014). The nature and power of interests. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(2), 98–103. doi: 10.1177/0963721414522812

"So what interests you?" many of us have asked prospective or new students. "What do you love to do? What are you doing when time just flies — and what are you doing when time seems to stand still?" By exploring what a student enjoys, we seek to discern what academic and vocational pursuits might fit the student's interests and skills. "The best job," we may advise, "is one that pays you to do what you love — be it doing things with your hands, thinking of solutions, expressing yourself creatively, assisting people, being in charge, or working with data."

Happily, as APS Fellow James Rounds and Rong Su explain, there is a well-developed career-counseling science that aims to assess people's interests systematically and to alert them to well-matched vocations. Among its findings are these:

Interests are *trait-like*. Individuals have differing interests, which become quite stable by early adulthood.

Interests are *contextualized*. Unlike traits such as extraversion, conscientiousness, or intelligence, interests have a focus — in particular activities in certain environments.

Interests are *motivational*. Like other motivations, they energize and persistently direct individuals' behavior toward attaining goals.

Thus, interests have repeatedly been found to predict academic and occupational choice and flourishing. That simple fact has enabled the creation of interest inventories that allow test takers to identify majors and vocations where people with kindred interests are flourishing — and where perhaps the test takers themselves would, too. Indeed, report Rounds and Su, findings from a recent longitudinal study of 400,000 high school students show that "interests uniquely predict academic and career success over and above cognitive ability and personality." The

power of well-matched interests to predict greater income, for example, "greatly exceeded the contributions of ability and personality."

So how might we help first-year students better understand their interests and select occupations informed by those interests? In personal correspondence, Rounds and Su pointed us to an online short-form interest inventory offered by the US Department of Labor sponsored Occupational Information Network (O*NET). At www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip, students will need about 10 minutes to respond to 60 items, indicating how much they would like or dislike activities ranging from building kitchen cabinets to playing a musical instrument. They are then given feedback on how strongly their responses reflect the six "RIASEC" interest types specified by vocational psychologist and APS Fellow John L. Holland: *R*ealistic (hands-on doers), *I*nvestigative (thinkers), *A*rtistic (creators), *S*ocial (helpers, teachers), *E*nterprising (persuaders, deciders), and *C*onventional (organizers). Finally, depending on how much training students indicate being willing to undertake, they are shown occupations — selected from a national database of more than 900 occupations — that are congruent with their interest patterns.

Before taking the brief interest inventory, students could also be invited to list their top three career ideas. A visit to www.OnetOnline.org will enable them to explore information about both their preexisting career ideas and additional possibilities suggested by the inventory.

References

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