

Title: "Teaching Critical Thinking in an Academic Minefield"

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Abstract

Critical thinking is an important aspect of the cognitive abilities that contribute to success in modern societies, but it is often in short supply. Every year, uncritical thinking causes millions of people to lose billions of dollars on everything from bogus health cures and get-rich-quick investment schemes to supposedly scientific matchmaking services and false billing notices. In the absence of critical thinking, jurors may be swayed by unreliable evidence to reach flawed verdicts and people with psychological problems may reject empirically supported treatments in favor of those that are novel and dramatic, but whose safety and effectiveness are unproven. These trends are due in part to the fact that scientific, logical thinking is neither instinctive nor easy. Fortunately, critical thinking can be taught, but in today's academic culture, efforts to do so can have negative consequences ranging from student protests and vilification on social media to administrative discipline or termination. In this talk, I describe some of these challenges psychology professors face these days when they ask students to think critically about controversial topics, and I offer suggestions for teaching critical thinking while avoiding tripwires in the academic minefield in which they may find themselves.

Bio

Douglas Bernstein received his bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Pittsburgh in 1964 and his masters and Ph.D. in clinical psychology at Northwestern University in 1966 and 1968, respectively. From 1968 to 1998, he was a member of the psychology faculty at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he taught graduate and undergraduate classes ranging from 15 to 750 students and served both as Associate Department Head and Director of Introductory Psychology. From 2006 to 2008 he was Visiting Professor of Psychology and Education Advisor to the School of Psychology at Southampton University, and in January 2009 was Visiting Professor and Education Consultant at l'Institut du Psychologie at the University of Paris. He is currently Professor Emeritus at Illinois and Courtesy Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida.

He founded the APS Pre-conference Institute on the Teaching of Psychology in 1994, as well as the APS Pre-conference Institute on the Teaching of Psychological Science at the biennial APS International Convention of Psychological Science. He was also the founding chairman of the Steering Committee for the APS Fund for the Teaching and Public Understanding of Psychological Science. In 2013, he stepped down after 30 years as chairman of the National Institute on the Teaching of Psychology, and in 2018 founded the Biennial International Seminar on the Teaching of Psychological Science in Paris. He has written or co-authored chapters and books on the teaching of psychology, as well as a compendium of classroom examples for psychology courses, a manual on progressive relaxation training, and textbooks on introductory, clinical, and abnormal psychology, and on criminal behavior.

His teaching awards include the University of Illinois Psychology Graduate Student Association Teaching Award, the University of Illinois Psi Chi award for excellence in undergraduate teaching, the Illinois Psychology Department's Mabel Kirkpatrick Hohenboken Teaching Award, and the APA Distinguished

Teaching in Psychology Award. He is a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, and he occasionally offers workshops on teaching techniques and on textbook-writing for prospective authors. As a hobby he collects student excuses.