

NAME OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: Jaime Derringer

EMAIL ADDRESS OF PRESENTING AUTHOR: jderr@illinois.edu

Teaching Human Behavior Genetics

Jaime Derringer¹

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, Illinois, USA

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ABSTRACT:

Students in behavior genetics classes are diverse in their educational and cultural backgrounds and goals. One thing they share is living at a time of rapidly developing genetic technology often marketed for personal decision making. In our research products, we call for consideration of impacts and regulation of applications and urge caution above all else. Nonetheless, history shows that new technologies, especially those applied to reproductive or medical decision-making, become more widely accepted over time. Regulation of genetic technologies has been slow and more often than not fails to reach a clear consensus. Although classroom-based education is currently one of our most common forms of public outreach, there has been little formal discussion of pedagogical practices in human behavior genetics. The social relevance of our science demands that we consider the 'Who', 'What', and 'Why' of our teaching practices. I will present a review of structures and topics typical in human behavior genetics courses and explore how these approaches do or do not meet goals for broadly targeted, introductory-level instruction within our field. I will also discuss the shifting goals for behavior genetic education, including training students as both producers and consumers of research. A modular course design enables ongoing updates, with the ability to rotate topics, sources, and approaches as needed to meet a variety of objectives. Educational models to develop critical thinking skills allow students to engage with emerging behavior genetic research well beyond the bounds of a traditional college course.