

# APS Teaching Fund Showcase: Microgrants for Online Learning

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In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic drove teachers and students out of the classroom and into Zoom calls attended from their bedrooms and couches, the APS Teaching Fund launched a Microgrants for Online Learning initiative to facilitate the dissemination of best practices for teaching psychological science remotely. The Teaching Fund Committee distributed more than \$20,000 in microgrants to support teachers moving classes online as a result of the pandemic. Here, the *Observer* highlights three of the resulting projects.

[Learn more about APS's support of online learning resources here.](#)

## Open pedagogy to make learning meaningful

Jill Swirsky, a developmental psychologist at Holy Family University, worried that the traditional education model might be particularly ill-suited to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. An instructor may spend hours conceiving of an assignment that students spend hours completing, and then spend additional hours grading their work—only to have the final products discarded at the end of the semester. Swirsky hoped that open pedagogical practices (OPPs) could facilitate better online courses, but she also understood that teachers adjusting to life and work in a global pandemic might not have time to learn a new instructional method. To help, she produced a series of three videos that introduce OPPs.

OPPs aim to make learning more meaningful by helping students produce digital artifacts—such as blogs and e-portfolios—as a part of the learning process. Later, these assignments may become public resources or work samples that students can show to potential employers. Another OPP strategy, social annotation, asks students to take notes in a collective digital space where classmates can learn from each other’s insights. In addition to allowing students to demonstrate their mastery of course material, OPP assignments help students to build technical skills. These methods also foster a classroom environment that rewards a variety of talents, such as social skills and digital skills, beyond writing, test taking, and memorization.

With help from project consultant Urooj Nizami and student video designer Darryl Loke, Swirsky produced brief tutorials that introduce OPP methods and provide practical advice for instructors interested in implementing social annotation and e-portfolio assignments. The videos have been distributed through a project YouTube channel (Psych Online: Open Approaches), APS, Temple University, and the Society for the Teaching of Psychology.

Swirsky welcomes feedback and perspectives from others:  
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[Visit the project YouTube channel.](#)

## **Health psychology gets personal**

David Sherman, an APS Fellow, has been teaching health psychology at the University of California, Santa Barbara, for nearly two decades—but in 2020, something felt different. Sherman was struck by how relevant his course content had become to students’ everyday lives as they collectively confronted COVID-19. He saw an opportunity to not only tie course content to students’ experiences but also to document lessons from the pandemic for future students.

Sherman’s Health Psychology & COVID-19 video series features 13 interviews with researchers, practitioners, and experts in the field of health psychology. For example, he speaks with Howard Leventhal of Rutgers University about what his previous research on the 1957–1958 flu pandemic can teach today’s health psychologists about COVID-19. The series also features perspectives from researchers who were actively conducting research related to the pandemic, including Robert Kaplan of Stanford University, who discussed his work on COVID-19 testing, and Angela Duckworth of the University of Pennsylvania, who discussed research on mask-wearing. Other interviews include Traci Mann from the University of Minnesota on teaching health psychology during the pandemic, APS Fellow Robert Sapolsky of Stanford on stress during COVID-19, Nancy Sin of the University of British Columbia on the ups and downs of daily life during COVID-19, and practitioners who highlighted the connection of health psychology to their changing work experiences, such as Paige Farrenkopf of Yale University, who served as a contact tracer. A compilation video is also available that integrates excerpts from the interviews with themes from health psychology.

Sherman’s video series is publicly available online, along with a syllabus. The materials have been distributed through professional organizations such as APS and the Social, Personality, & Health Network.

[Visit the project website here.](#)

## **Demystifying careers in science**

Allison Buskirk-Cohen felt troubled by research showing that most undergraduate students do not feel that they belong in scientific fields. To show undergraduates that research is for everyone, she conducted 10 interviews with diverse, renowned psychological scientists. The interviews, now available on YouTube and on a dedicated website, focus on the researchers' personal lives and their personal paths as researchers. The project aims to inform and inspire future psychological scientists.

Along with these videos, the Making Research Personal website collects educational resources that complement the interviews, including instructions for reflections, questions, article analyses, and reviews of the researchers' websites. The site also provides specific learning outcomes drawn from standard psychology curricula and even matches potential courses with each researcher's interview, so that instructors and students can easily locate the interviews they might be interested in.

Buskirk-Cohen hopes that the digital resources encompassed by the Making Research Personal project will be valuable through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. She is proud that the virtual guest lectures connect students with top scientists in a cost-effective way and reinforce important psychological concepts.

To date, close to 1,000 users have visited the Making Research Personal website. A survey of student users suggested that the project provides valuable career insights and a better understanding of psychological research.

[Visit the project website.](#)