Dr Alison Behie
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Citation
For sustained excellence in student-focused teaching that motivates students through intellectual excitement and encourages creative and independent thinking about real world situations.

Synopsis
In just two years at ANU, Dr Alison Behie has become an integral part of the School of Archaeology and Anthropology through the development of three new research-based courses that substantially increased biological anthropology course offerings – a field which is unique to Australian institutions.

By exposing students to research both in the classroom and in the field, with her primate behaviour field school in Cambodia, Alison has effectively combined practical research with theory. This is crucial for students to become independent learners who are able to identify their own strengths, passions and goals.

Alison’s approach to teaching and supporting student learning
Two of the key ingredients to truly motivate and inspire students are enthusiasm and passion. Regardless of subject matter, students get excited about what you are excited about. By showing my love for teaching and the subject matter I can help encourage students to develop their own strengths and goals for the future.

This is furthered by my continual goal of weaving research with teaching in such a way that students are given the opportunity to engage in research activities in a variety of ways – from developing a research question in the classroom to collecting data on wild primates in a field school setting in Cambodia.

I believe the real goal of a university career is student self-discovery. This makes it critical for lecturers to make students the focal point of each lesson and makes them feel comfortable in learning, regardless of ethnic or academic background.

I make it clear in all of my classes that the best way to learn is through interactive, inquiry-based learning. By participating in class or working in small groups, students are not simply passive learners but become more actively involved in the learning process, increasing their ability to critically assess material and to work with others to problem solve. This student-centred approach to teaching is linked to a deeper development of skills required for critical analysis, as well as the synthesis and integration of material.

To get students passionate and developing their own thinking skills I attempt to have them find value in what is being taught and connect it to their larger goals through drawing parallels between lectures and other facets of related disciplines.

Since starting at ANU I have developed all of my courses directly out of my research interests and projects, carefully linking classroom teaching with research. I am particularly proud of the field training course I run in Cambodia that gives students the opportunity to put theory into practice conducting their own field studies on wild primates. This is a unique opportunity at an Australian institution, yet is necessary for students to develop skills within the discipline of Biological Anthropology.

Using this student centred and research-based approach I am helping to produce ANU graduates that have a well-rounded knowledge of the discipline as well as the skills required to be an effective researcher in any field. Seeing connections between classroom material and practical research also allows for students to discover, for themselves, the applicability of the material – which is a key component to student comprehension.

“Dr Behie has had a significant impact. The passion and intellectual excitement she brings to her own research, and the support and dedication she provides to her students was an integral part of my decision to begin my PhD at ANU this year.”

Student