

---

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF INSTRUCTORS IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY

ROBERT L. MORRIS

There are two sources of input into this paper which I should clarify at the start: my preconceived notions about how to teach parapsychology to a diverse group of students, developed while I taught the topic to honors students in psychology in small seminars at Duke University and as Research Coordinator for the Psychical Research Foundation; and what happened to me during the past year when I attempted to apply these notions to the teaching of parapsychology to undergraduates at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Each quarter I have offered three full-credit courses in parapsychology through the Tutorial Program, a separate interdisciplinary department. *Introduction to Parapsychology* is designed to expose students to the general problems and complexities of present-day parapsychology. *Research Methods in Parapsychology* provides a detailed look at the research methods presently used and the reasoning behind them, from a critical perspective. Students are encouraged to participate in the design and conducting of research projects. *Internal States and Parapsychology* examines in detail the recent research which relates the internal state of the receiver to psi success. Included are discussion and readings on the general problems of investigating complex human experiences, "altered states of consciousness," and so on, without hopelessly interfering with them. Students are also encouraged to participate in the design and conducting of research projects. In addition to these three courses, several options for independent research credit are available.

There are several major groupings of students who are likely to sign up for courses in parapsychology, each with somewhat different needs.

(1) Those who are unaware that parapsychology as a research area even exists, and who may or may not have beliefs about the nature and validity of psychic experiences. At least two students who signed up for my courses admitted later that they had expected to receive training in

how to assist psychologists in their therapy sessions, much as paramedical training does for medical assistants. Both completed the course and seemed none the worse for wear. They were pleased to learn that we do exist and were collecting information that might eventually contribute usefully to their daily lives.

(2) Those who are aware of parapsychology, but have no firm opinions, and who are simply eager to learn more about it.

(3) Those who wish to pursue active careers in parapsychology, either full-time or as part of their other chosen profession. They need an accurate picture of the present state of the art as well as its likely future, when they have finished their education and are competing for funds and jobs. They also need special training in the most modern parapsychology research tools, and in the related areas of physics, biology and/or psychology that are most germane to their potential and intended careers. Finally, they need an accurate and honest assessment of their own likelihood of success. The parapsychology instructor should be prepared to serve as a vocational guidance counselor and should not be afraid to dampen enthusiasm, if that seems fairest and in the best interests of the student.

(4) Those who readily accept far more psi phenomena than they should, as a result of inaccurate media-disseminated information. Such students are often hard to deal with, because they must be taught how to judge for themselves and why their present judgments are premature, without hurting their feelings or insulting their intelligence.

(5) Those who place psychic phenomena within a firm religious context, to be validated by science but not to be studied and understood (and thereby profaned). These students are often very hard to communicate with, and are probably more inclined to drop my courses than any other group. To be effective with them it is necessary to understand their approach to religion and what needs are being served by their specific approach to psychic phenomena. This is a tall order in a one-to-one discussion, and is impossible within the context of a classroom of a hundred students, unless the students in question feel free to approach the instructor outside of class. It is easy for me to say that the real need of such students is to be given a more objective perspective on the validity of various psychic claims so that they can conduct the rest of their lives on the basis of more solid and reliable information; such a position could readily be debated, however, and will be touched upon again below.

(6) Those who follow a specific set of occult practices and order much of their lives according to astrology, Tarot, I Ching, voodoo,

demonology, and so on. Such people are often playing a game, which they either continue or abandon according to social circumstances beyond the influence of any parapsychology course; or, they may be pursuing a practice which really seems to work, in their opinion. In the latter case, they are often disappointed to learn that they won't be given further instruction in the latest occult practices. The instructor has the difficult task of trying to show such an individual the difficulties of validating the efficacy of such practices in a way that will seem to make sense, and not just be an academic, perfunctory dismissal. This is a message, of course, that such a student is not particularly eager to receive.

(7) Those who are skeptical about the research in parapsychology and feel it is poorly done. Often such students are very sophisticated science majors and desire detailed information about experimental procedures and results, and general research strategies. The instructor must find ways to address those needs specifically, yet without going beyond their classmates' expertise and boring them.

Thus the instructor is faced with an extraordinarily diverse group of students with equally diverse needs. Some instructors may prefer to screen students to weed out some of the above groups, but this is not always feasible or desirable, and essentially leaves the excluded students high and dry. In my opinion, general instructors in parapsychology share three major interrelated responsibilities if we are to be effective.

First, it is our responsibility to the student to present parapsychology in a way that is genuinely meaningful to the instructor. Otherwise we will be hesitant and insincere in a way that is readily picked up by today's students. They will then be thrown back on their own uncertainties, having learned that even the professed expert has doubts and confusions which he/she is unwilling to admit.

Second, we must do the above in a way that allows us to communicate effectively with a wide variety of students having diverse backgrounds, areas of expertise, and emotional needs, rather than just those whose specific way of looking at the world resembles our own.

Third, we must accomplish both of the above with accuracy, reflecting as best we can the true present state of the art in parapsychology. This means resisting the temptation to push any form of strong belief system personally held. A corollary of this is that the instructor must be able to communicate with and get along with other faculty and administrative staff within the instructional institution, many of whom may be concerned about the impact of parapsychology instruction on campus.

Success at all three is difficult. If the third is sacrificed for the first, or first and second, the program will probably fail because it will either be terminated or will be so severely restricted as to be ineffective. Unsuccessful resolution of this problem may have led to the termination of some programs in the past.

The problem of interfacing with one's colleagues within the administration, faculty and staff is an issue often acknowledged but rarely addressed, and yet an instructor who fails to establish good relations with those around him essentially deprives himself of one of the major values of college-level parapsychology, namely the opportunity to interact intellectually about the problems of parapsychology with peers from different disciplines. It is well known that Duke University's identification with parapsychology was not always advantageous to Duke in general and to the Duke Psychology Department in particular.

The personnel of any school worth its reputation should be realistically concerned with the caliber of any parapsychology program that develops on campus. They must understand and be in reasonable sympathy with the philosophy, goals and practices set forth by the parapsychologist(s) involved. This means that such philosophies, goals and practices must be well thought out and communicable upon demand to a variety of academics who may have radically different world views and language systems. Research procedures advocated should be clear-cut and airtight.

Parapsychologists are very accustomed to viewing themselves as a maligned minority group, the victim of intellectual prejudices. Yet in truth many of the attacks against the field do have some solid basis. Many of us still do very sloppy work and indulge in naive theoretical meanderings in public places. This must be acknowledged from the start in academic interactions, or the instructor/researcher's credibility with peers and students alike will disappear swiftly.

Last quarter I required a term paper from my introductory students. One option was to read and write a critique of any experimental article from the *Journal of Parapsychology*, the *Journal of the ASPR*, or the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, finding at least two major flaws in procedure. Over forty of them chose to do so, and none had any difficulty. In summary, to set up a program of instruction in a college is to request to be taken seriously; to be taken seriously one must be quite serious oneself.

My own approach to these problems and perceived responsibilities has been to develop and present an interdisciplinary construction of psi that uses the simple language of communication theory in a way

that can be related to a variety of disciplines. Psi is construed as implicit communication between organism and environment through means other than presently understood channels.<sup>1,2</sup> In each case we have a source, receiver, and message, but no specifiable channel by which the message is propagated.

In ESP paradigms the target is source, information about it is message, and the subject is receiver. In PK paradigms the subject is source, the content of a goal-directed intent is message, and the target is receiver. In neither case can a channel be specified, and communication must be inferred through observed correspondence between source and receiver.

The goal of parapsychology now becomes to find the channel(s) and understand the entire communication system in detail. Such a conceptual system makes few assumptions and provides a set of terms that can be easily understood by mathematician, physicist, biologist, psychologist, anthropologist, and so on, all of whom can understand and use the concept of communication systems. Each discipline is still free to translate these terms into its own vocabulary when needed. The study of communication systems and the development of new systems is a very commonplace occurrence today and is well within the rubric of one or more interdisciplinary programs as well as individual departments on most major campuses today.

In presenting such an approach to the student it first becomes important to insure that the student well understands all the presently known modes of communication, the explicit systems for which we can identify channels. Only then can he understand why under certain conditions we are willing to infer that, because we have eliminated the known modes, a new mode may be at work. To get this across, I generally devote two lectures near the beginning of the introductory course to demonstrating various techniques for simulating psi, such as muscle-reading, trick blindfolds, stacked card decks, telepathy codes, audience stooges, various seance-room techniques, modern electronic communication and detection systems, how to phrase and time public predictions, and so on. Most students soon learn that impressive psychic demonstrations can be faked surprisingly easily, and this starts them reevaluating the processes of logic by which they infer communication in the world around them.

Next the students are given a relevant overview of sensory and cognitive psychology, emphasizing the range of ways we can take in information and process it; and a bit of biophysics, emphasizing various nonbehavioral ways we can put information out into the world around us (e.g., by modifying the intensity of the electrostatic field around us, and so on).

With this information in hand, we consider the early history of parapsychology, the problems of interpreting individual spontaneous experiences, and the uses (and misuses) of large collections of thematically related spontaneous cases for generating hypotheses about how psi works.

Once this beachhead has been established intellectually, the student can be confronted with the complexities of experimental research in parapsychology. Such research is described within a communications context. In order that we may infer that a new system of communication is in operation, two things must take place: (1) we must eliminate all known systems; and (2) we must show that there is sufficient correlation between source state and receiver state, i.e. that a message of some sort actually did get through from source to receiver.

These two elements of parapsychological research are the keys by which communication along specific channels of any sort is inferred. The student learns to confront any experiment (or personal experience) by asking what channels of communication, if any, are open between the designated source and receiver, and how much information, if any, really did get through to the receiver. In this way the study of parapsychological research designs and procedures can teach the student general principles of communication that he can use in daily life as he interprets his own experiences and how they relate to the world around him. Thus the course has value above and beyond formal parapsychology training, an important point when it comes time to justify the presence on campus of parapsychology in its present state of uncertainty and infancy.

The remainder of the course is divided into three main sections: (1) what are the consistent findings in parapsychology research; (2) what are the main kinds of hypotheses about how psi works, and how do they relate to the empirical data on hand; and (3) if psi is for real, what are its implications for our daily lives. The last section includes cross-cultural studies of psi, and an examination of the ethical issues presented by psychic development courses, professional psychics and psychic counselors, as well as other related topics.

Throughout such a course I have used two texts, one positive and one negative, assigning comparable readings from each. This helps the students to retain a balanced view and also serves as a constant reminder that gifted writers can be emotionally persuasive without necessarily being factually accurate.

As an additional part of such training students can be shown in detail the logic behind adequate studies of psi and the differences between adequate and inadequate studies. Useful illustrative studies for student learning by participation include: standard card-guessing and

dice-throwing procedures; sensory deprivation free-response studies involving relaxation tapes and Ganzfeld procedures; remote viewing; stable system PK studies using thermistors; Schmidt machines; and plethysmograph studies. All involve equipment that can be purchased or constructed at relatively little expense. My students and I have used these procedures, among others, and found it a valuable experience.

This also helps to keep up the interest of students, as both subjects and experimenters, and helps them to develop a good feel for the interdisciplinary teamwork needed in any serious psi project. By being both subject and experimenter they learn to appreciate the problems of each role and the delicate relationship of each to the other. Intensive critical examination of specimen studies can be a valuable tool for instruction in advanced experimental parapsychology courses, and can also provide an opportunity for independent replication of some of the most important studies. Additionally, most good students are capable of coming up with occasional creative insights about how to investigate a given area.

There are many additional issues that can be raised, depending on the expertise of the instructor and the interests of the students, most of which involve the relationship of parapsychology to other disciplines. Physics becomes involved in any discussion of "paraphysics" and hypotheses involving energy fields around our bodies, bioplasma, psychoenergetics, and so on.

Cognitive and humanistic psychology, as well as philosophy, become involved when the discussion turns to currently fashionable notions of "alternate realities," the epistemology of personal knowledge, and so on. Anthropology and religious studies become a part of any discussion of occult practices and psi, spirit hypotheses about the functioning of psi, and so on. The issues in these areas being raised today often seem to be a rehashing of old problems, that are recurring without benefit of genuine scholarly expertise in the relevant disciplines. An ideal solution is the use of team-taught courses involving someone knowledgeable about parapsychology and a friendly faculty member in the associated discipline.

By setting up course work in this way I think we can satisfy the responsibilities outlined earlier as well as appeal to a wide variety of students in ways that will be deemed genuine education, rather than sensational education, by one's colleagues.

An additional set of responsibilities of parapsychology instructors involves a complex set of ethical issues related to the needs of today's average naive but intelligent student. If psi is taken seriously, one can easily acquire an exaggerated view of the permeability of the boundary

between oneself and one's environment. David Rogers<sup>3</sup> cites a client of his in North Carolina who, after taking some card-guessing tests and being told he seemed to have ESP, began to assume that psychic interactions were taking place all the time. Soon he lost his friends because of his "weird" behavior and his life became very painful.

This individual was somewhat unusual to begin with, and his response is obviously not typical. This does not absolve us of the responsibility to confront intelligently others like him when they come along. One of the first things I did on the UCSB campus was to give a talk at the student counseling center and establish ties with a community relations center, making clear who I was, what my goals were, and asking for feedback if students started pouring in with psychic complaints. To my knowledge none have.

A second ethical obligation is to help people avoid being easy prey for "psychic ripoffs"—superpsychics who charge to tell you how to conduct your life or diagnose and heal all illnesses; and courses that purport to teach you how to be a superpsychic yourself. A favorite final exam question of mine asks the students what they would investigate and how they would do it if they were members of a Nader's Raiders task force assigned to parapsychology. This helps them think for themselves, organize the material they've already received, and come up with general principles which they can then apply to specific situations.

A third responsibility in this area is to describe in detail the methodological complexities involved in investigating spirit-related and energy-related hypotheses about how psi works. These two lines of thought have had strong adherents for hundreds of years, and today are frequently offered as ready explanations for psi. Without detailed knowledge of the problems involved, we can readily find one or the other quite persuasive, such that we are tempted to build the rest of our lives around a set of concepts that may well be patently false. As mentioned earlier, a good approach is to bring outside expertise from related disciplines, perhaps as guest speakers, to deal concretely but fairly with the issues. Since many students may have acquired emotional adherence to one of these viewpoints, it thus becomes doubly important that the material be presented fairly, without insulting the people involved.

A fourth responsibility is to orient students towards critical consideration of the implications of psi for present-day society. This means focusing attention on the potential creative uses of psi in interpersonal communication, teaching, child development, and so on, as well as its potential misuses. Some people with apparent psychic



ability are very happy, others very unhappy. What is the difference, and how does it relate to the individuals and to the larger social context within which these individuals find themselves?

A final responsibility, covered in part earlier, is to insure that students are fully aware of the ethical issues that have been raised in general over experimentation on living organisms.

At present I don't think we instructors can completely fulfill all of these responsibilities; they touch on many issues that are not about to be resolved satisfactorily for some time to come. Nevertheless, by raising them now among ourselves, and by discussing them openly in the classroom, I think we can keep open the kind of dialogue that will have to take place in order for us to be prepared to deal with these issues ourselves. Also, we will hopefully place pressure on those who close off these issues and refuse to discuss them. Our message to students now must be one of enlightened uncertainty; to claim otherwise is to go considerably beyond our present experiential and empirical data base.

#### REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Morris, R. L.: "Building Experimental Models," *Journal of Communication*, 25, (1975), 117-125.

<sup>2</sup> Morris, R. L.: "Tacit Communication and Experimental Theology," in *Research in Parapsychology 1974*, Morris, J., Roll, W. G., and Morris, R. (eds.) (Metuchen, N. J., Scarecrow Press, 1975), 179-198.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers, D. P.: "Driving Subjects Crazy," in *Research in Parapsychology 1974*, Morris, J., Roll, W. G., and Morris, R. (eds.) (Metuchen, N. J., Scarecrow Press, 1975), 165-170.

#### DISCUSSION

**KRIPPNER:** This was a very exciting presentation about some of the things that can happen when the opportunities and the finances and the administration combine to make them possible. Hopefully, this is something that will emerge on other campuses over the next half-dozen years. I'm just curious about all the paraphernalia and equipment that you brought in. Which did the students find most motivating? Was it the thermistors, the polygraphs, or what? Is there anything that really intrigues them more than anything else?

**MORRIS:** I don't really think there is. I think there are a great many individual differences involved and that's one of the values of this sort of approach. I'm quite surprised sometimes at the people who get very wrapped up in certain kinds of experiences. I must say that the remote viewing procedure has been especially useful as a heuristic device

because it is a new area of research; most of the good thought about it hasn't been done yet. It involves exciting and interesting and yet very complex targets to analyze. In our research methods class through the summer quarter, we had two separate teams—one of which was involved in collecting the data through the remote viewing procedure, and the other, all three of them, focused almost exclusively on the problem of what it means to be a judge and how one develops adequate judging techniques.

**KRIPPNER:** Have you been able to use the same orientation procedure that the Stanford Research Institute uses for remote viewing?

**MORRIS:** We took a field trip up there with six students. Russell Targ and Hal Puthoff put us through a session right there and we were able to bring back a good feeling for their procedure. The part of the SRI orientation that emerged as most salient to us was that they really build up the confidence of the person involved in the beginning. They've estimated that they work for a minimum of an hour with anybody before they actually start the experimental session, describing all the past success they have had and they make the statement that basically they have yet to find someone who can't do it. By the time we actually got into the remote viewing study, we had done a rather intensive methodological hashing through of their procedure, etc. So we were not necessarily quite so confident that the effect was consistently statistically demonstrable. We said to the students "Look, we're using this as a device to work out methodological problems, so be aware of that; however, when you actually get into the testing situation itself, try as best you can to approximate what went on up there, including the air of confidence they built up."

**Roco:** The Santa Barbara program is in its second year, and I'd like to ask Dr. Morris a question. After having run these courses now for a considerable length of time, what do you feel is the greatest area of educational success and what do you feel is the greatest area of educational failure during your period of time at Santa Barbara?

**MORRIS:** The second question is a lot easier. I'm not sure what successes I have had, because I wouldn't want to measure them for another year or two. I guess the greatest problem really is finding good source material. There is no textbook that really gets into all the topics that I feel should be covered. At least a third of my course is non-parapsychological material. It is background material and I'm badly in need of getting my own notes in these areas organized and some sort of reference material out. And, of course, some of you, I'm

sure, will find the communications approach inappropriate. It's just simply one that I feel good about and that I found I could communicate to people from religious studies through mathematics, and all the folks in between. I would say, as a matter of fact, that that may well be the strongest personal success that I've seen there; I am able to put people together from quite different disciplines in the same room and have them, somewhat imperfectly, still at least able to talk with each other. Afterward you can run off to your own department and use what language system you're most comfortable with, but in the meantime you've at least been able to share some sort of conceptual integration with members of other disciplines. I try to get my advance students to form small teams from different areas so that they can help each other and complement each other. Ideally, they get a feeling that when progress is being made, it's being made by an interdisciplinary team and not by the isolated researcher.

**PALMER:** I have never actually taught in parapsychology, but I have had the experience of students dropping into my office and asking me about it, and one of the problems I found, and which I think might generalize to the teaching situation, is usually that the first question someone asks me is, "Have you read such and such?" And "such and such" being a piece of "trash." I won't get into the names of books, but I'm sure most of you know what I have in mind. More often than not my answer is "no," because frankly it's hard enough to keep up with the good material without getting into the trash. But on the other hand, I find that often as soon as the student realizes that I'm not up on this—here's someone who is supposed to be up on parapsychology and he hasn't read this great book—I find I'm tuned out, I can't criticize this particular book because I haven't read it and if I try, the answer is, "Well, how do you know it's a bad book if you haven't read it?", even though I would know something about the author. My question is, from your experience, is it important to have grounding in this literature? Should an instructor in parapsychology be up on the occult trash, so that he can deal with it when he's asked about it?

**MORRIS:** I think you've raised a really important issue. I think that to the extent that we can, we either should ourselves, or we should know people who have specialized somewhat in that area. I have some students who have read extensively in some of these areas, who have now come into my classes and become much more methodologically oriented. They often are now able to go back and re-interpret the systems that once had captivated them and then they can do the job for me that I can't do.

But one term paper project that we did one quarter was kind of interesting—what I call “The Airport Project.” I had everybody sign up for a separate paperback of the kind you’d find in airports on the newsstands—that’s why it was called “The Airport Project.” They were told, “Take one that emphasizes techniques for psychic development; do a book report on it; review in detail as much as you can the exact procedures for becoming a psychic as outlined in that particular book, and then criticize it with respect to what we’ve covered so far in class. About 47 different books were reviewed in that way and we were able to come up with about seventeen common themes that were present in almost all of those books. The fascinating thing was that the same great advice for how to show psychic ability, is probably excellent also for developing sensory hyper-acuity, and so it is not necessarily surprising that these books worked. Almost all testing procedures offered to validate the methods were extremely weak and generally amenable to sensory cue alternative explanations. With respect to Dr. Palmer’s original question, now I can offer this to people as a completed study and say, “All right, now you’re into a specific system. Let’s look at it and analyze it.” The one thing I try never to do is to assert that astrology or whatever is junk, because I truly, of course, cannot prove that. I can opine it, but I cannot assert it and I will eliminate myself as an intelligent human being very quickly if, in fact, I claim I can disprove astrology. I ask students what kind of source material they’re familiar with and what kind of documentation they have that a procedure such as astrology works. Are they familiar with research literature suggesting alternative possibilities? For instance, if people are born during summer in temperate climates, they start to crawl when it’s winter time, and are kept off the floors, bundled up, etc. People have argued that personality differences depend in part on what time you first start to crawl. If you’re born in the winter time, then come the summer you have much more freedom to move around unhampered and thus develop quite different attitudes. Such suggestions are always in a reasonable friendly way. Your system may be fine; let’s just get down to the details. Sometimes the people come in excited, do reports and get guided a little bit further. Sometimes the battle continues; sometimes I just simply never see them again.

FRANKLIN: I was very happy to hear about the involvement of students with experiments in SRI. I’ve found a similar reaction. I’ve had students involved in my own personal experiments—students from my classes that have come in and helped me with experiments. Their own positive attitude—their positive thinking comes forward then. We’ve had exposure of films in an experiment with Olga Worrall

and one of my pre-med students took some Kirlian photographs and got some very interesting results.

Another thing I wanted to comment on was the course content—rather, I wanted to ask you about it. Were you able to include anything on electromagnetic effects on living systems, or anything on nerve physiology or physical theories—anything of that sort?

MORRIS: The physical theories, some that you've outlined, I'm not competent to give. Sometimes I can get somebody in the electrical engineering department or in physics as guest lecturers on that point. As far as these biophysical influences on human tissue that you were talking about, are concerned, I certainly make clear to them that those exist. I am limited in my capacity to give them the exact research details, but I can draw from animal sensing systems to illustrate a lot of the work done in that area. I try to make it very clear to them that there's a lot of physical interaction we have with the world around us. I detail maybe three or four and say, "Look, there's a lot more. This is just an area we haven't gone into; it's been taboo to a large extent itself for a variety of interesting reasons," and that generally opens them up enough to say, "Okay, from now on we'll bear that in mind," especially in interpreting phenomena involving close interactions between an organism as evidence for some new form of communication.

RHINE: When I listened to Dr. Morris' talk about what teaching parapsychology means to him, I can't help but think back to my own efforts forty years ago which offer a contrast. There is so much today that has happened since then; that is evident in what all of you are teaching on the subject today. I think the conference has been an education in itself. If now anyone could make a composite course—a course based on all of these offerings at least it would make a splendid educational beginning.

But I want to add a word about those who, like Rhea White, are not doing formal teaching, because it was in our laboratory that she first crossed the threshold of parapsychology. As she spoke I was mentally reviewing her career. It struck me that there ought to be some way to recognize this quiet, back-in-the-corner and largely volunteer work that she's been doing, which has been so basic for the field in a broader educational way. There ought indeed to be some kind of a special sainthood for people like that—librarians, editors, statisticians,—a suitable award perhaps.

ANGOFF: That is the last paper of this conference. All the papers and all the discussions have been recorded and will be transcribed, and the

entire proceedings of our three days of meetings will be published in book form next year.

The officers and trustees of the Parapsychology Foundation thank all of you for your contributions.

Ladies and gentlemen, this conference is adjourned.