

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS



College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

From the Office of the Associate Dean

A Philosophy of Teaching

I believe the essence of good teaching is rooted in a love of learning coupled with excellent communication skills. I teach with a commitment to caring about what students learn and how they learn. A unique aspect of my teaching is that I am a “context” teacher. In other words, I try to teach students in the context of their major, career aspirations, and overall goals. I continually remind myself that learning and teaching take place in the larger context of the student’s life. A practical consequence of this is that I talk with students frequently. Sometimes we discuss course material. Often we interact about how something covered in class relates to material learned in another class, a study abroad opportunity, or an internship possibility. My strengths in teaching include an eagerness to learn and enthusiasm about what I teach. Combined with diligence in preparation and clarity of organization, I am an effective communicator and teacher.

The best analogies to describe the methods I use when teaching are “brick laying” and “tapestry weaving.” The brick laying portion is sequential and requires telling a story that has all the necessary elements. It is easy to follow and fits together well. The story might be that day’s lecture or it might be the bigger story of the course from first day to last. I weave tapestry as I take one part of the course material and thread it back through an earlier part of the subject matter. I weave a concept covered early in the course over, under, and around a concept covered later in the course. This method of teaching requires an intuitive feel that arises from the accumulation of much knowledge, skill, and hard work.

More important, this style of teaching builds a momentum for learning that becomes fully apparent in the later stages of the course. Like a fine tapestry, there are technical and artistic elements.

The technical elements, for example, involve knowing at what voice level to give a lecture or how to adjust the pace of delivery for the audience. It also involves knowing how and when to frame questions and getting students actively involved in the learning process through a variety of activities. I have the technical side of teaching down fairly well. The artistic side takes a lifetime to perfect. I will always enjoy working at it.

I present material in a variety of ways and formats — bringing the course content to life. My goal is to make the subject matter lucid for each and every student. It is particularly rewarding for me to include current research into my teaching, which I do quite often. I believe this method of teaching is one of the reasons I have been named to the “List of Teachers Ranked as Excellent” many times. It is very satisfying to have students acknowledge my teaching in this way.

I also “teach” when I talk with students about their internship experiences and relate it back to previous course work or future career goals. I do it when helping students compare and contrast something learned while studying abroad in a culture and business climate different from their own. This is the method I use whether I am teaching undergraduate or graduate students—a different context is emphasized but the process is quite similar. I care about teaching and do not take lightly the fact that I teach excellent students at an excellent university.

--Anonymous by request

Dean’s List Spring 1999

A total of 407 students were named to the Dean’s List in ACES for Spring 1999. The minimum GPA for the semester were: Seniors, 3.522; Juniors, 3.571; Sophomore, 3.562; and

Freshmen, 3,471. Included among the list were 78 students who earned a perfect 4.0!

Academy of Teaching Excellence

The Academy of Teaching Excellence is in its eighth year, and a permanent record of membership is now in place. Be sure to check out the new plaque outside 101 Mumford Hall.

The current members of the Academy are:

1999-2002

Philip Buriak, Agricultural Engineering
Thomas W. Fermanian, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
Jasna D. Jovanovic, Human and Community Development
Joseph H. Pleck, Human and Community Development
Michael J. Plewa, Crop Sciences
Hans P. Blaschek, Food Science and Human Nutrition (1999-2000)

1998-2001

Michael A. Mazzocco, Agricultural and Consumer Economics
Robert M. Skirvin, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
Gary J. Kling, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
Tom R. Carr, Animal Sciences
William C. Sullivan, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences

1997-2000

Philip Buriak, Agricultural Engineering (1997-99)
Darrel J. Kesler, Animal Sciences
John F. Reid, Agricultural Engineering
Shelly J. Schmidt, Food Science and Human Nutrition
Robert M. Skirvin, Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences (1997-98)
Cleo J. D'Arcy, Crop Sciences (1998-2000)

Fall Teaching Symposium Emphasizes Cognition

ACES Student Awards Banquet,
Illini Union Ballroom,
Sunday, April 30, 2000, 12:00 noon

Nearly forty ACES instructors participated in the second annual ACES Fall Teaching Symposium. Dr. Susie Whittington of Penn State University presented useful research and practice information to help instructors identify levels of cognition in teaching and student assessment. Participants received specific guidance on the level they are currently teaching and testing, and how they can move student learning to higher levels of cognitive abilities.

The symposium was sponsored by the Academy of Teaching Excellence and ACES Academic Programs.

Tomorrow's Professor

A colleague at Cornell University recently shared a web address for the Stanford University Learning Laboratory. Enrollment is free, and subscribers receive periodic mailings that address a variety of topics associated with being a college professor.

The listserver can be located at <http://cis.stanford.edu/structure/tomprof/listserver.html>. Instructions for subscribing to the listserver are included at the bottom of the home page.

The front page of the Learning Laboratory site can be located at <http://s11.stanford.edu>.

Large Class Newsletter

The University of Maryland Center for Teaching Excellence provides access to the "Large Classes Newsletter." The newsletter

was designed to provide a resource which can help teachers improve their work in the challenging environment of the large lecture course.

The newsletter can be located at <http://www.inform.umd.edu/cte/lcn/index.html>.

Assessing Student Achievement

“Value-added” is a term that is frequently used to describe how researchers and practitioners start with a basic commodity and increase its economic value by doing something with it. Many times that means some type of processing. We’ve been doing that for years in the agriculture arena, from turning corn into cornflakes to making yogurt out of soybeans. Education, too, is a “value-added” process. We take a basic commodity (called freshmen) and turn them into well-educated members of a global society.

How do we measure the value that we add? Historically, we have looked at indicators such as employment rates and acceptance to graduate programs. Those are good outcome measures for the finished product. But the finished product is the result of many value-adding activities within the undergraduate experience.

Think about the course you teach. What “value” do you intend to add to the basic commodity that appeared on the first day of the course? The answer is probably in the course objectives. How do you know that *your course* adds value? A final exam shows where the students are at the end of the semester, but may not assess how much value was added during the semester.

One way to measure value-added is by administering a “final exam” at the beginning of the semester. The results of the “pre-test” should define the basic commodity that started the program. Comparing those scores with final exam scores will help define how much value was added to the student’s educational experience. As a side benefit, the instructor may also discover that some topics in the course need little attention, and some assumptions about how much knowledge the students brought to the course were off the mark. So adjustments can be made to allow for even more value to be added by successfully completing the course.

Instructors may be concerned that giving a final exam at the beginning of the course will

influence scores on the actual final. Most literature, however, assures us that the benefits of knowing the questions on the final exam will diminish over the 15-week period, and final scores will reflect actual knowledge gained from the course rather than from knowing the questions in advance.

Shaping the Future

Shaping the Future is the title of a 1996 report by an advisory committee that conducted an intensive review the state of undergraduate education in science, math, engineering and technology for the National Science Foundation. Of interest are the recommendations contained at the end of the report. Of most relevance to us are the 10 recommendations for faculty. They sound like a blueprint for better undergraduate education across the entire landscape of disciplines, not just in the fields reviewed.

- Believe and affirm that every student can learn; recognize that different students learn in different ways and with differing levels of ability; and create an environment in each class that both challenges and supports.
- Be familiar with and use the results of professional scholarship on learning and teaching.
- Build into every course inquiry, the processes of science, a knowledge of what practitioners do, and the excitement of cutting-edge research.
- Devise and use pedagogy that develops skills for communication, teamwork, critical thinking and lifelong learning in each student.
- Make methods of assessing student performance consistent with the goals and content of the course.
- Start with the student’s experience; understand the student may come with significantly incorrect notions; and relate the subject matter to things the student already knows.
- Build bridges to other departments, seeking ways to reinforce and integrate learning, rather than maintaining artificial barriers.
- Develop partnerships and collaborations with colleagues in education, in the K - 12 sector and in the business world to improve the preparation of teachers and principals.

- Model good practices that increase student learning.
- Take seriously academic advising that helps students have as much flexibility as possible and is linked to career development services of the institution.

From *The Teaching Professor*, August/September 1997

More on Plus/ Minus Grades

Scott Martin, Vice-Chair of Senate Educational Policy Committee in 1998-99, shared the resolution that was passed by Senate on October 19, 1998, regarding Plus/Minus Grading System. The resolution as adopted reads:

EP.99.05 All faculty should be required to announce to their classes at the beginning of the semester (before the drop date) whether or not they will employ the plus/minus grading system. Multi-section courses, which are coordinated and monitored by a single professor or group of professors, must be consistently graded: i.e., all sections must use the same grading system (plus/minus or no plus/minus). Consistent and uniform grading policies should exist in all sections.

ACES Supports Scholars

Assistant Dean Chuck Olson recently completed an analysis of merit scholarship support for students in ACES. In 1998-99, 796 scholarships were awarded by the College to ACES undergraduates for a total of \$576,468. An additional 120 scholarships (\$108,300) were awarded through the Departments, for a grand total of \$684,818 awarded to students. These figures do not include need-based awards provided through the Office of Student Financial Aid.

ACES enrolls top scholars from throughout Illinois. Scholarship support is an important ingredient in recruiting and retaining the best students. Thanks to the ACES Office of Advancement and all who assist in generating these important funds to support students.

Among the Largest

The National Summary of Fall 1998 Enrollment of the Colleges of Agriculture, Renewable Natural Resources and Forestry reports that ACES is the 16th largest college in the nation in terms of undergraduate enrollment. Neighboring universities also appear in the top 20, including Iowa State at 9th, Michigan State at 13th, Purdue at 15th, Missouri at 17th, and Wisconsin at 20th. The largest college of agriculture and related sciences in the nation is at the University of California, Davis, with 6,133 undergraduate students.

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