

# My Teaching Philosophy

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A primary mission of a university is to develop the potential of its students to think creatively and independently and to communicate effectively. Fostering the teaching-learning process is vital to advancing our civilization. This teaching-learning process is complex, in part because it continually involves new and unique combinations of individuals and circumstances. Some students are easily motivated, other are not. Potential learners often have widely differing values and expectations. The teacher must assist each student to identify goals and motivate him or her to strive strongly for them.

For learning to occur, the student must become interested in the particular subject. Research has shown that the enthusiasm of the instructor is a primary factor that motivates students. I enjoy working with people and like teaching immensely. I am excited at the beginning of each semester, even though I may be teaching a familiar course, because it is the beginning of a relationship with new people. Hopefully my enthusiasm will be contagious and help motivate each student to achieve his or her potential.

Teaching, as does anything worthwhile, requires that you give a lot of yourself. As a student, I was discouraged when teachers could not be located or appeared bothered by questions. I try to be available whenever students need assistance. I post office hours and give students my office and home telephone numbers. While this may result in calls at a busy time, the response of students is more than ample reward. I maintain an open-door policy to encourage student requests for assistance.

The beginning of each semester is crucial to the success of the teaching-learning process. Students quickly form opinions regarding their particular set of courses, and a positive beginning is essential for a successful learning experience. It is very important to carefully outline the goals and directions of your course at the first class meeting. Students cannot be expected to "get there" if we don't let them know "where we are going". I distribute a course outline with assigned readings to allow students to plan and monitor our progress. I use behavioral objectives for each unit of my course in Plant Science, Forage Management and Utilization, and Plant Growth and Development. These are important student guides for students as they prepare for examinations. Testing procedures and the grading scale must be clearly understood by students. I believe that a well organized course is desired by students and assists them to achieve more from the course. I also enjoy the challenge of learning the background and interests of my students each semester. I survey each class initially and then try to adapt the course material as much as possible within overall course objectives.

Teachers must continually strive to keep abreast of the advancing knowledge in their field. This is best done by maintaining an active research program. Reading current literature and attending research meetings better prepare me for the classroom topics. It is equally important to keep abreast of the changing situations in the "real world". Students demand and deserve relevancy and teachers must be aware of the situation in the field as it currently exists and as it changes. I regularly attend Agronomy Field Days and speak at extension meetings to gain interaction with farmers and ranchers. I often see parents and former students at these meetings and enjoy the opportunity to gain feedback relative to my courses and to our programs. I visit my father and occasionally with farmers in my home community to maintain an awareness of the current situation. I read the popular press to be aware of the information currently available to producers.

I really care about my students' learning and I believe they respond to this. I try always to be cheerful and enthusiastic, but realize that some lectures are not as good as I would like them to be. I strive for a relaxed informal classroom where anyone can ask a question at any time without risking embarrassment. I strive to always be honest and fair to my students.

Teachers must challenge students to think for themselves. Too often we teach at the lowest level of learning by requiring much memorization. The goal must be to relate academic principles to current problems and issues. It is also important to give praise for a job well done. I make notes on students' papers regarding good answers as well as deducting points for incorrect responses. I send congratulatory letters to the top students in my classes after each semester.

It has also been noted many times that as much learning likely occurs outside the classroom as in the structured times of lectures and laboratories. I participate in as many one-on-one situations as possible to become better acquainted with students as individuals. Advising departmental clubs, scholastic honoraries, a fraternity, and coaching collegiate crops teams have provided many extra opportunities to become better acquainted with students. I am certain that students appreciate these extra efforts and give added effort in return.

In summary, I believe that teaching can occur only when students are motivated to learn. Subject matter must then be communicated in an interesting manner and at the proper level of understanding. Learning can occur at any time or place, and the teacher must be always alert for "the teachable moment". Mutual respect must exist between teacher and learner. This can be developed only through personal contact and concern for the student. I am proud to be a part of the teaching professional and I receive great satisfaction from helping each of my students develop more of his or her potential.

Posler received the 1987 NACTA Ensminger-Interstate Distinguished Teacher Award. see NACTA J., Sept. '87, p. 43. He is a professor of Agronomy at Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506.