

Statement of Personal Teaching Philosophy

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Due to the fact that I spent a number of years in industry prior to returning to the classroom at Penn State, my path to teaching was not what most people consider the traditional track. I still vividly remember teaching my very first class. Armed with what I was convinced was at least 3 hours worth of material, I ran out of notes 45 minutes into the lecture. I learned my first two teaching lessons that day: First, I talk too fast. Second, when I adlibbed the remainder of the time discussing how the technical information we just covered would actually be used in practice, I realized I had a winning technique. Even a disinterested student can thrive if they can be made to recognize and believe in the relevance of what they are being asked to learn.

Since that time, I have expanded on this common sense approach to teaching and learning keeping one overriding promise that I made to myself when I started teaching. Never forget what it was like to be a student. And, in later years, teach and administer each course in a manner that you would want other instructors to follow if the students were your own sons and daughters.

With that in mind, I also realized that teaching comes with a number of important responsibilities. Always be prepared. Maintain a mastery of the subject matter and deliver it in a relevant manner. Demonstrate an excitement for the topic and the profession and make efficient use of student time in and out of the classroom. Act in a professional manner by setting high academic and ethical standards for your students. Finally, be fair and flexible as appropriate.

In order to be a successful instructor, it is necessary to continue to learn. I learned a number of my techniques from the experience of teaching students in my many years at Penn State. At the same time, I listened and learned from students which other course instructors they felt were good teachers and why; borrowing and adapting techniques from other successful faculty.

Many of the techniques I developed or sculpted from others over the years turned out to be very similar to those developed by Murray Sperber, a professor emeritus of English and American Studies at Indiana University at Bloomington. I remember reading his notes on teaching in an article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in 2005 and thinking that if you changed the name of the departments involved, most of the article could have been a list of my "lessons learned" from teaching. The simple fact that someone else believed the same techniques worked well in teaching, regardless of the majors of the students, provided me renewed interest to focus and refine my methods.

Two of the most valuable and effective techniques in helping students to learn and control the manner in which they approach a course include: Make sure the expectations for each assignment and the course in general are extremely clear to the students. And also, it is absolutely essential to customize and vary teaching methods not only to maintain student interest in the course, but to find the best way to deliver particular course material. For example, I use techniques including conventional lectures, self directed study, web-based tools, active learning and campus field trips, interaction with practitioner / mentors (both in person and electronically through discussion boards), portfolios and even a stand-up comedy routine modeled after the television show *Myth Busters* that is popular with engineering students.

Finally, I stress discovery and the process of learning to my students. Within a few years of graduation, most of my engineering students will have easily outpaced the actual practice examples I was able to introduce in the classroom and shortly after that, they will realize that technological change is outpacing their field of knowledge unless they continue to learn. At that point I rest in the comfort that I have taught them how to learn, not what to learn.