

B) Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is deeply imbedded in my overall professional philosophy of “do much good”. As a faculty member for 32+ years my professional philosophy has evolved as my knowledge and beliefs have been tempered with time and experience and, as such, goes well beyond the physician’s creed of “do no harm” to instead to “do much good”.

My Career as the Rule of Thirds - During the first third of my academic career (the first 10 years or so), my emphasis was on establishing a nationally and internationally known creative program so that I could achieve success, gain tenure and promotions, and excel as a faculty member. Publications, grants, and graduate student education consumed most of my time and efforts with a 60 - 85% research appointment in a college of agriculture. I was still able to also give back to my colleagues and students in the Horticulture program at Clemson University by developing and teaching several effective undergraduate and graduate level courses as well as serving as the Graduate Coordinator.

The middle third of my career (approximately nine years) was directed toward departmental administration. During these years I was able to contribute to the greater good of the department as chair/head of Horticulture Departments at Clemson University (for two years) and Penn State (for about seven years). My efforts were primarily directed toward improving the well being and direction of the faculty, staff, and, especially, our students.

For the later third of my career (the last 13 years), I have focused most of my efforts toward improving the overall undergraduate learning experience for our Horticulture and now Plant Science students at Penn State. More recently (in the last three years) I have also begun to break away from the “safety zone” of my home department (Plant Science) and interact with a greater diversity of students and faculty at the University through teaching a popular General Education course (Hort 150, GN - Plants and Society), and participating in academic activities sponsored by the Schreyer Honors College (the Distinguished Honors Faculty Program and the Global Honors Faculty Program).

While I taught several undergraduate courses early in my career it wasn’t until I became a departmental administrator that the importance of the student learning experience to the success of the department was highlighted to me. In my administrative positions at Clemson University and Penn State I was responsible for enhancing student learning through effective and appropriate resource management (such as designating appropriate instructors for courses and securing and distributing funding so instructors and students could succeed), encouraging faculty driven curriculum revisions, and implementing appropriate teaching assessments to gauge our success at attaining the objectives of the curriculum. At both universities, our teaching programs helped guide our national and international reputations as leading horticulture departments.

I believe students engage and learn through meaningful formal (classroom) and informal (out of classroom) experiences. I strive to make my interactions memorable for the students. While I expect high levels of intellectual engagement and mastery in the subject area, I also desire the students to become empowered to “live” the class material and, more importantly, see their roles in enhancing our current knowledge of the subject matter and subsequently improving society. I engage and motivate my students through delivering effective lectures, providing opportunities to enhance their knowledge through appropriate supplemental research activities, and developing meaningful and lasting personal relationships that hopefully will assist them in attaining their life goals.

I have seen many changes during my career in students, curricula, advising, mentoring, and assessments, but none of these experiences prepared me for the changes that were evolving within me. As a beginning faculty member 32 years ago I would never have imagined how devoted I would eventually become to improving the overall experience for our undergraduates. One of my basic professional principles is to give back any good fortune that I receive hopefully with dividends. Working with students has allowed me to do that. My teaching philosophy of “do much good” to the student learning experience is very appropriate, as the student teaching experience has “done much good” (and more) to me and my career.