

McCAIG-KILLAM TEACHING AWARD
Professor **G. Campbell Teskey**, Cell Biology and Anatomy

Teaching Philosophies (strategies and tactics).

Based on careful observation and critical evaluation I realized that the best professors I had all shared a set of similar characteristics; 1) they were highly competent with both the material and the delivery of the course, and 2) they cared deeply about the success of their students. My philosophies of teaching are built around those two dimensions ("competence" and "warmth") and I put an enormous effort into both my lectures/labs and into student success. But most importantly I talk with my students, share ideas, take the time to explain why I am doing what I am doing, *listen carefully* and modify my approach accordingly.

Competence

Organization, Expertise, Transparent expectations: An organized course helps students because the materials are there for them when they need them. For instance, my courses and their contents are always well organized in advance of delivery. Reading materials and PPT presentations are uploaded for student access weeks in advance of class time. Examinations are formulated and previous feedback incorporated into them before the course launches.

I ensure that I am an expert on the material presented to the student. This involves substantial time commitment reading outside of my research area, but it is one of the reasons I became an academic - to continuously become more broadly and deeply educated. I also endeavour to make my courses as interesting and relevant as possible.

Little can provoke anxiety and hostility in students more than hidden and bizarre professorial expectations. Thus, I make my expectations and the evaluations in my courses as transparent as possible. This requires real effort as it is too easy to slump into assuming the students will know what you want and how you will want it - constant vigilance and effort is required.

Fair, Diverse and Multiple Evaluations:

I spend a great deal of effort ensuring that my examinations are "fair". By this I mean that the questions reflect the foundational material and not trivia. That the proportion of the grade on a particular topic or question is proportional to the time and amount of material on that topic and that the questions are clear and unambiguous. When I have made errors on evaluations, I admit them and remove the question. I believe that at least a small proportion of students should be able to achieve an A+ level grade or else I haven't been fair.

I plainly state that if students appeal one of my written evaluations their mark will either stay the same or increase, *not decrease*. Many of my colleagues will make it clear to students that their mark *may* decrease upon appeal. I feel this is a form of coercion and I find that to be contrary to establishing trust and a positive learning environment. My policy has not led to an increased number of appeals as some had predicted.

When I gave in-class evaluations I ensured that the types of questions were diverse (short answer, essay answers, fill-in-the-blanks, multiple choice). The education literature at the time indicated that the performance on different types of questions were highly correlated. I don't doubt this but individual students sometimes struggle with a certain type of question and they appreciate the opportunity to answer questions in the format that they are comfortable with.

I feel it is important to have multiple evaluations over the duration of a course such that the students be given the opportunity to learn from feedback and to improve performance and understanding. I also have

McCAIG-KILLAM TEACHING AWARD
Professor **G. Campbell Teskey**, Cell Biology and Anatomy

a policy that if the performance on one particular evaluation, relative to the others, is quite low I am willing to shift the proportion of the grade in the students favour. In Neur 201 I give the students an opportunity to hand in their final paper 2 weeks before the final deadline so they can receive feedback from me, allowing them to learn and enhance their paper (and grade).

Timely feedback: Students should receive feedback on their performance a short time after their evaluation. I have been consistent in providing students with their marks on any given evaluation within one week of its due date. I also require my teaching assistants to do the same. I have found that the students greatly appreciate the effort.

Warmth

I have a simple philosophy, "Think of students as people and treat them as you would want to be treated".

Demonstrating my investment in student success:

I actually care that students learn and grow as a consequence of interacting with me as their professor. I do not "lecture" per se but talk with the students about the subject material. I encourage students to interrupt and ask questions. I would happily spend all of class time answering their questions rather than providing new material during class. I encourage diversity of opinion and expression of those opinions, but I will also point out logical flaws in arguments, false premises, lack of scientific support for a particular view and the limits of scientific knowledge.

I have an open door policy that extends to students taking my courses, students in my laboratory and students within the HBI. If I am in my office and a student shows up at my door, I will take the time to listen and if they want it, share my opinion. Most of my workday involves talking with people (I do most of my writing at night and on weekends at home). Students trust that I will keep their confidences.

I am open to feedback and altering my courses (material, delivery, evaluations, etc.) based on student experience. I take class time to talk about these issues so that the students understand that they are a vital part of the process.

I also promote student success by taking the time to write a comprehensive letter of reference, with specifics highlighted. I have learned that time investment has an enormous impact on the success of the student. For students in my laboratory, I also send them to conferences and acquire the equipment and support they will need to achieve success in their research. I then make every effort to publish with my students.

In summary, not only do I provide my students with disciplinary knowledge and how the impact of that knowledge influences people and society, but I also promote critical thinking and problem solving skills. I advocate for research and scientific methodology as a way of answering questions. This is done in a collaborative fashion through the work of effective teams of which they become full members. Communication in all forms is a critical component and should be done with enthusiasm for the subject and with clarity of thought. The skills that are obtained by my trainees are to be used responsibly and ethically. I appreciate that the students in my classes and lab come from diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives and their beliefs are respected. Finally, my students are themselves encouraged to teach and mentor others as part of our social contract.