

If you could tell a future professor ONE thing, what would it be?

Compiled by Kathleen McKinney; April, 2007

Responses to the above question are from my generous colleagues on the POD network discussion list and the Teachsoc discussion list over a period of 24 hours. These have been grouped by me into two broad categories—though some responses could have gone in either category—

1. advice on general behavior/development/relationships; and
2. more specific advice on courses or teaching.

Remember these are "spontaneous" quick email responses to the question.)

About your general behavior or development or relationships with others

Be yourself.

Teach from your strengths (but work on areas of improvement) so you can address the multiple ways students learn.

- Debra L. Berke

The three A's: Affable, Available, Able -If you don't have the first 2, no one will ever care if you have the last.

- Judy Silvestrone

Your students are not like you -- get to know them for who they really are.

- Carolyn Oxenford

To clearly identify a picture of what it is you are passionate about studying through research and teaching with which to shape your classes and your research so as to make it easier to balance them no matter in what institution you find yourself.

- Anne F. Eisenberg

You will spend a lot of time in the classroom for the next twenty years. If you would like to make those years more enjoyable, take the opportunity to work with an instructional consultant now, when your publishing demands are minimal.

Also, I would look at Mary Dean Sorcinelli's list of "the top ten things new faculty would like to hear from colleagues." There's a copy at

<http://ctl.stanford.edu/Tomprof/postings/566.html>

- Dakin Burdick

Based on my research (just finished) on new professors developing identities in the academy:

1. Breathe during the first year - it's partly crazy because it's all new.

2. See if you can find someone to 'show you the ropes' - and think about making this a relative newcomer. If there's a handbook for grad students in your department - read it - you'll learn lots about the culture and the rules.
 3. Try to integrate your roles as soon as possible. Seasoned often do. See how closely you can align your roles as researcher, teacher, service provider.
 4. Connect if it helps, but don't be afraid to close your door.
- Nicola Simmons

To read *The World Is Flat* to better understand the pressing need of educators to prepare "synthesizers" and "integrators of Knowledge" for the future by 'integrating' ourselves...and by thoughtful preparation of assignments to invite transdisciplinarity.

- Trish Joyce

I do these workshops at Purdue for graduate students who will one day be professors. I tell them that if they hate grad school now they will never make it in academia because the only thing that will change is their mailing address.

- Mick La Lopa

From the outset, be thoughtful about "boundaries." You will soon discover that you *could* work 24/7 and still /never/ really feel you were "finished" or "caught up." So, be planful - and be mindful about the need for balance and boundaries. Build time into your schedule for family, friends, and recreation. You will find that by achieving balance you will be optimally productive and effective as a teacher, scholar, and member of the campus community.

- Kathy Watson

Make friends with the department secretary!

- Sharon K. Calhoon

What I would tell PhD students about their future as a professor is that no matter how busy or overextended their lives as graduate students appear, when they are a "real" professor, their lives will be even more busy and "insane." They must be able to juggle a massive number of projects well and shoulder the stresses of academic life (long commutes to work, disgruntled colleagues, search committee interviews, etc), while still - I think - maintaining a "good life" (family, friends) outside the university.

- Renee Love

LISTEN to your colleagues and to your students.

-Nancy Chick

I would advise future professors to love their students. With a genuine love for students, instructors somehow work out all the issues of course design, methods, class rapport, etc. If they can't love their students (and not everyone can), they might consider a different line of work, for their own life happiness as well as their students'.

- Linda Nilson

I think I would tell them that if we hang around a while, the society will change, and that will change the truths of what we learned, but the academic constant is the belief in asking questions, new questions for new societies, and they will lead to discovering new truths.

- Bruce Wagner

I'd tell them all the things people have recommended, then I'd tell them to sign up to Tomorrow's Professor...and then to spend about a year working through all the advice to be gained there.

<https://mailman.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/tomorrows-professor>

- John Collins

I would first "ask" them [the PhD students] what their notion of academic freedom is and how they think they would exercise it. Academic freedom is one of the core principles that the profession grew around and yet, no one really talks about it anymore--at least not until there is an infraction of some kind. Based on their responses, I would then try to explain to them (1) what academic freedom means in terms of both research and teaching; (2) what are the responsibilities and limitations that are associated with AF; and (3) what do the typical threats look like from outside the academy (censorship, chilling dissent, etc.) and inside--i.e. faculty / administrative abuse and neglect.

– Zachary Goodell

Love each and every student in that classroom! Don't just say it. Live it!

- Louis Schmier

Be committed to learning how to help your students learn. Be committed to doing what it takes to help them learn. That should make a positive difference in your life and in the lives of your students. In the end, making a positive difference is the legacy each of us should aspire to.

-Dick Reddy

One piece of advice would be to do what you love. It will show in your teaching, research, and personal life and make all the hard work worthwhile.....there is also something I have heard discussed "discreetly" by new instructors/profs elsewhere as something they were not anticipating but were also not ready to discuss openly is academic politics. Some academic politics are particularly unpleasant as are some academic people. Think of the harsh disillusionment of young profs who encounter, for example, other profs who teach the perils of inequality in their classrooms (the theory) then backstab each other for limited resources. Rise above these instances by being a pleasant, genuine, honest professional. Work particularly hard NOT to become part of this problem and to find solutions.

– Kathy Stolley

To paraphrase Zig Ziglar - Students do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

- John T. Thompson

Be authentic! Experiment with teaching/learning/being styles until you find the one that fits (you'll know it when you find it).

- Teri Balsler

We are door-openers, not gatekeepers.

- Joel Bush

I would say that a teacher needs to care if their students learn, respect them and the knowledge and experience they bring to the classroom, be responsive to their needs, and compassionate with regard to their struggles, but I doubt the majority of the TAs you talk to would really shoot for loving all of their students. Mother Theresa maybe. =-)

- Shelley L. Smith

In all of your professional life, as well as in your courses, define goals and establish priorities. Then constantly check to be sure that you are putting the top priorities first. Don't let things like checking email, writing long memos, and trying to cover all the course material distract you from the things that are important to you.

- Ethelynda Harding

For teaching I would say: Remember the classroom is about student learning - focus on that! For research: Get yourself out there - don't be shy - introduce yourself to the "names" in your field. For service: Be a good citizen but know when to say no.

- Donna M. Qualters

There are many ways to get to Philadelphia. But I don't think going through Seattle is the shortest.

- Karl Schnapp

Assume a positive intent! For that one student you perceive to be negative towards you or the course, assume a positive intent about what that student says/does. Fifty percent of the time your perceptions about that student being negative are probably incorrect (born with grandpa's scowl?), and for the other fifty percent, your positive outlook may just shock 'em into becoming chipper.

- Cynthia Desrochers

Even back one step from Ed's recommendation to align institutional mission, values, and culture with one's own personal values, I'd be inclined to create an awareness of the gap between the vision and the contemporary experience of an academic career. There are great words of wisdom in the Rice, Sorcinelli and Austin (AAHE Working Paper Series) "Heeding New Voices: Academic Careers for a New Generation" publication.

- Patti M. Thorn

We had the pleasure of hosting Dr. Ken Bain for a talk here at Richmond a few weeks ago. In a follow up interview, that is the question I asked him. You can hear his response here: <http://terrydolson.net/blog/2007/03/06/dr-ken-bain-visits-ur/>

- Terry Dolson

Reflect deeply about yourself and your enthusiasms. Be true to yourself. This will show to your students much more than anything else - we teach who we are. If you love learning, you will help others to learn. -looking forward / mirando hacia adelante
-Alice Macpherson

Those of us who teach "Soc of Families" are well aware of the principle of least interest-- i.e. the person with the least commitment to the relationship has the most power. I often tell junior faculty members on my campus and elsewhere that the same maxim goes for professional life at the university. The person who invests himself or herself exclusively and intensely in the local college (failing to develop professional ties through regional and national sociological associations) is reducing her/his options and power. If anything goes wrong at my own campus (with a Dean, a Chair, some students, etc) and my own sense of professional identity is invested entirely in that institution, it can be devastating to me. However, if I am well networked and seen as competent elsewhere, this helps my own sense of competence and self (I have more than one looking glass) but it also means that I would be valued elsewhere and can be mobile if that becomes necessary. I am not likely to feel "trapped" and my Dean/Chair may actually begin to reconsider my value to the university. (Nothing like a lucrative offer from another school for people locally to suddenly think you are an asset!) So my advice to beginning faculty members is to have multiple investments in the larger profession and to network in disciplinary circles. Do invest yourself in your local institution and develop a reputation for being a true professional....but don't invest everything in one place. Don't have more interest in the institution than that institution has in you! Not my only answer, but something worth passing on to beginning faculty.

- Keith Roberts

Teaching customarily involves two or more people. Its success is a function of the quality of the relationship between/among teacher and student(s).

- Linc. Fishch

I have many things I would say but the thing that popped into mind when I read your original post was: Remain a student. Take a class. Any class. Academic or non-academic. Take a class to stay connected to what it feels like to be a student, to be unfamiliar with material, to get confused by instructions or explanations, to be nervous about asking a question, to not be able to keep up, or to wish others would catch on more quickly. Take a class to stay connected to what their experience as learners might be.

- Lisa Handler

1. In any decision or choice you are making in your role as a professor- be it teaching, research, or service—first ask and answer the following question: What will be the impact on student learning? 2. Being a Professor should be more than just a job or even a career, it should be who you ARE; part of your identity. If it is not, you might reconsider your future. 3. Look for good fit between who you are, what you love, and the institution you select.

- Kathleen McKinney

About Courses/Teaching

"You can't save by analysis what you bungle by design." Richard Light in *By Design*. In other words, if you take the time to design your courses you can tell if your students are learning and produce SoTL at the same time.

- Laurie Richlin

I would tell them to read the chapter on teaching in Robert Boice's "Advice to New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus," particularly in regard to moderating the amount of time they spend on class prep.

- Gina J. Hiatt

Remember that your class sessions should be organized around what you want students to learn - what they should know, be able to understand, do, or feel differently at the end of class. "What do I want them to get out of this" should be your guide, not "what will I teach or do" during that class session.

- Ellen L. Nuffer

As a former Teaching Fellow at Boston College, I vividly remember being given some wonderful advice: "Resist the temptation to be the smartest one in the class." This is not an easy concept for students right out of grad school.

- Phyllis Gleason

Really CARE about students, not just as students but as *persons*; Use MULTIPLE teaching modalities.; DON'T use PowerPoint EXCEPT for showing data, diagrams, tables, photos.; Never READ to students EXCEPT for small quotes from books, journals, etc.; WALK around the classroom; don't be glued to a lectern or to a spot on the floor.

- Michael Klausner

Be learner-centered, not self-centered. It's not about you, the teacher. It's about the students and their learning. Prepare for the unexpected. Not every class session or student behavior will go as planned or as expected. That's OK. Enjoy the ride.-Remember that not all of your jokes will your students perceive as funny. Don't be alarmed if you're the only one laughing at times. Mix up methods--lecture, small group, whole group discussion, student presentations. Go to faculty development events. Tap into the resources that your campus CTL provides.

- Lori Schroeder

I make a point in my first class of a term of telling the students, "I'm not here to teach. I'm here to help you to learn." Then I do my best to live up to that. It has taken quite a few years to get there...

-Richard Walters

When things seem overwhelming, when you get nervous about the materials you must present, when they ask questions you cannot answer, etc., remember one thing: At the end of the semester, you will still know more about sociology than your students will know. Remind yourself as often as needed.

- Robert J. Hironimus-Wendt

I would tell them that it is more important that students learn than it is for them to teach...but that it is very important that they teach and teach well....

-Thomas R. Thibodeau

When teaching, inevitably, you will have days that are disastrous and days that are marvelous. Try to remember that the 'disastrous' days were not as bad as you thought. At the same time, when you think your teaching was marvelous, try to remember, those days were likely not as marvelous as you thought. The moral: Temper your judgment of your teaching with the understanding that we exaggerate most everything when in front of a group.

- Dan Pratt

Know your students - take some time to learn something about them, and connect the concepts you teach to their lives (and you might just learn to "luv 'm").

- Susan St. John-Jarvis

My 2 cents -- deliberately phrased in provocative terms - Think really hard before ever showing a film during class time. Unless it's off-the-chart-awesome AND there is some clearly important benefit from SEEING it together AND it is impossible to distribute through other means (e.g., on reserve in library, streaming, outside showing, etc.) movies are a really big cop out, waste of time, and insult to our paying customers. Would you require students to read aloud in class rather than reading outside of class? That's what ordinary filling up of class with a video amounts to. Sure you get discussion from it, but supposedly we are good at getting discussion from readings too. There ARE some great videos out there and there are some films that do a wonderful job of illustrating sociological concepts. But why should film have a different status from the printed word?

-Dan Ryan

Because you are college students, each of you already has a great deal of valuable knowledge regarding college teaching. That knowledge is important, but it is also incomplete and problematic. As students you've observed what goes on in classrooms, how teachers act and interact, and various learning activities and course structures. However, even if you've been very attentive what you've experienced is only half the story. What you haven't seen is the planning, the informed choice-making, and the reasoning that underpins all good teaching. If you take this time to examine what you already know about teaching you will probably find that you know a lot about "how" teaching is done, and what you need to discover is "why".

- Jim Borgford-Parnell

If a student asks a question and you don't know the answer, say that you don't know, and that you will try to find out. If one attempts a speculative answer be sure the students know that you are speculating. Try as we might we can't know everything. Worst of all, don't make up data!

- Brian Copp

Ok, I have TWO things, so you can choose one! 1. I would tell them that it is a mistake to rely only on their own experiences as a student as a guide for how to teach. You have to look at the literature to find better ways of doing things. 2. There is no single "good" way of teaching. There are many ways and the good teacher learns to judge which method works best for a particular situation.

- Mano Singham

Think carefully about the kind of institution that you want to be in before you apply, and avoid mismatches or places that seem to have no signature identity of substance. When you get an offer, spend a day or two there on your own beyond the interview and talk to others on the same tenure track/adjunct--whatever status you'll be accepting-- to be certain the institution contains the atmosphere you'll really want to breathe in. After you sign on, make friends with your faculty developer on your new campus. Study Tom Jones' cases in *The Missing Professor* and Bob Boice's *Advice for New Faculty* to develop successful habits and avoid getting into bad situations.

- Ed Nuhfer

Find your students as soon as you can, and find out what they are learning and not learning. Teaching is not about us as teachers – even though the focus is on ourselves as we begin teaching. How could it be otherwise, since it takes a while for us to feel and achieve some degree of competence and confidence as teachers? Teaching is, however, about our students and their learning. No learning, no teaching, as Ken Bain in *What The Best College Teachers Do* says so simply and so obviously (once you realize it). Listen to students in whatever ways you can figure out in order to find out what they are hearing and not hearing.

- John Thompson

Hold your students to high standards but provide them with the tools they'll need to meet them.

- Lauren Clodi Whitehead

Your students are likely to be implicit rational choice theorists...trying to get the highest reward for the least expenditure of effort and the least "pain." However, if you respond with a rational choice focus yourself--trying to catch them in the "game" and beginning to play the game yourself--you ensure that only surface learning will occur. The art of college teaching is to stimulate "deep learning" -- and "deep learning" requires a conversion of students to social constructionists; they must come to seek meaning in their education, in interpretation/understanding of social patterns, in the search for wisdom. Deep learning is perspective transforming learning that lasts a lifetime, and that

entails a search for and application of meaning. So, avoid the temptation to play the cost/benefit game and do not treat your students as "customers." They are too important to be mere customers. They should be your mentees in the search for meaning and wisdom.

– Keith Roberts