



Question 11:

What has been your greatest success story with teaching, and how has this success affirmed your decision to teach?

“I’m not sure what my greatest success story is as a teacher, but that is the great thing about being a teacher. I was with Dr. Ed Pappas at Wayne State University earlier this year, and he pointed out that as teachers we often don’t know the impact we are having at the time we are having it. It might not be until years later that we come to understand the impact we have had. He’s had a tremendous impact over the years. Perhaps the next student I interact with will be my greatest success story.”

David Bodary, Sinclair Community College
2015 Michael and Suzanne Osborn Community College Outstanding Educator Award

“One student from Korea was about to flunk out of college because she was terrified of speaking in public. She’d been able to fade into the woodwork in a number of courses, but as she rose to her junior year, her psychology major required more and more discussion-based seminars and presentations. Finally, the powers that be allowed her to return to campus if she would take my public speaking class and work with me in addition. She actually came up with the proposal, because we both sang in a town-and-gown choir.

She worked hard in the class, and came to see her reticence not as incompetence but as culturally based. She insisted at first that she just wasn’t smart enough; but the fact that she spoke Korean, English, *and* Bulgarian countered that. She said that she was reluctant to speak in classes because it took her longer to come up with ideas of what to say, and by then her classmates had already said what she was thinking; so I worked with her faculty to allow her to speak first. By the time she graduated, both her professors and her peers were impressed with how articulate and self-confident she’d become. For my part, I was grateful for my broad interests in communication, allowing me to pull from public speaking, intercultural communication, and communication pedagogy.”

Kathleen J. Turner (Emerita), Davidson College
2007 Donald H. Ecroyd Award for Outstanding Teaching in Higher Education

“As a teacher, I always evaluated my success by the growth I saw in my students. Observing this growth was particularly rewarding when it occurred in unlikely students and unexpected situations. One student who competed with limited success voluntarily spoke of his competitive experiences as ‘stretching’ his personal boundaries. Another student, who barely spoke in class all semester, held his audience spell-bound with his speech about bull riding in rodeos. After I retired, I listened as a small-town veterinary presented a book review to a meeting at which I was a guest. I thought to myself that she organized her remarks using the method I always instructed students to follow. As her presentation neared its conclusion she began speaking of an influential high school

speech teacher—me! Knowing that my teaching positively influenced growth in students is my greatest reward as a teacher.”

Diane Ritzdorf, Arapahoe High School (Centennial, CO)
2001 Marcella E. Oberle Award for Outstanding Teaching in Grades K-12

“It has been my privilege to teach in the academic classroom at the University of Maryland and in the corporate classroom for a considerable number of federal agencies during my years in the Washington, D.C. region. The opportunity to teach in a variety of academic and corporate venues has affirmed my decision to be a teacher. I am fortunate to have highly-motivated, bright undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Maryland. Additionally, federal employees at all levels are required to present their work in project briefings, and I am contracted as a trainer and as a coach to prepare listenable briefers. Teaching in academic and in corporate settings enables me to continuously utilize that experience to rethink, refine and retool what I do and how I function as a teacher. The intellectual energy this provides for me and for my students is priceless.

Research suggests that people who have found their purpose in life are happier and live longer. I always emphasize to our incoming graduate students that ours is a dynamic, ongoing field that makes a difference. So we need to embrace that purpose and live the academic life to the fullest.”

Andrew D. Wolvin, University of Maryland, College Park
2016 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award

“Let’s see. The greatest success is picking up the old paycheck and knowing I have earned it. By earning it, I mean I am secure in my knowledge that my students walk away from my classes knowing more about communication than they did when they stepped through the door. I NEVER have gone to class unprepared (if that meant missing a meeting with the President of the university, it meant that....I did indeed call the President and tell him I wasn’t coming to a meeting he had set up because he scheduled it during my class prep. time--students/classes come first regardless), I never turn back papers/tests late (you expect your students to do things in a timely manner . . . the same applies to you). I always read each paper and write comments on each. Each student (the best or the worst) receives compliments on things well done and ONE item to improve on for the next assignment. Of course, one needs to plan things so that you don’t have 300 papers on your desk that have to be returned the next day.

If an assignment is unacceptable, I return it along with appropriate comments. If the assignment is then turned in in acceptable form . . . gets graded if not too bad. I do everything I can to assure students succeed in my classes. Occasionally, I have to fail a student but it wasn’t because I didn’t give him or her every opportunity to succeed. Students do not get to pass my course unless they master the material.

I detail everything in the syllabus and expect them to keep track of what they are expected to do day to day. If I think they are not keeping up with assignments, I give pop quizzes. Grades are great motivational tools and I use them freely for that purpose.

I decided to teach because it was a lot easier than the jobs I had before teaching. I got more time off. I really like having summers off. The pay is pretty good considering the hours required. I put in 40 hours a week when I am teaching full time. I put in 0 hours when I am not teaching. I work those 40 hours. I spend very little time listening to all the gossip, whining, complaining of my colleagues (colleagues who routinely report 80 hour work weeks but who do not get papers graded, studies published, etc. . . . I have little sympathy for their constant complaints about being overworked . . . they spend too much time on the political aspects of the job and too little time on the job itself. Teaching is a pretty easy gig if you keep your eye on the ball). I spend very little time processing students' uncertainties, anxieties, etc. If they have a problem processing the material/with data collection/with data analysis/ and so forth, I am always ready to interact with them. Students are expected to show up at office hours to deal with these issues. I do not go off to the student union or the local pub with them. I set up appointments for students who have issues (educational issues) that would take longer to process than could be processed during office hours. I send students elsewhere to get help with problems outside my scope of expertise. I do not see myself as a counselor, a friend, a comrade in arms, etc. I am a teacher and they are students. I know something and they want to learn about that, end of story. Once I have no more to teach them and we have moved beyond student/teacher roles, we might become friends/colleagues."

Joe Ayres, Washington State University
2005 Wallace A. Bacon Lifetime Teaching Excellence Award

"It is difficult to isolate a success story however I know I made the right decision to teach all those years ago. I didn't go to college thinking I would major in communication. In fact, my entire family was in the retail business and my sister was a senior at the same university where I was a first year student. I thought I would major in the same area she majored in—fashion merchandizing and marketing research. My first semester in college, I realized this was not the major for me. I knew I wanted to help people and I asked myself how I could do that. Teaching became the answer but the question was, what could I teach? When I took a communication course, I knew the answer. I was also fortunate to have a wonderful role model and mentor, Dr. Kenneth L. Brown, who exemplified the kind of teacher I could only hope to be. To this day, I credit my success in teaching to Dr. Brown who taught me what it meant to be an educator. If I have been successful at teaching, I know I owe much of it to him! I have just completed 43 years of teaching and I have loved it since the first day I walked into a classroom. I am truly fortunate to say I have done something for the last 43 years and love it just as much as when I started. Maybe that is my success story!"

Sara Chudnovsky Weintraub, Regis College

2014 ECA Donald H. Ecroyd & Caroline Drummond Ecroyd Teaching Excellence Award