

My teaching philosophy is built around three personal core values: Community, Understanding, and Awareness. I believe that when I infuse my personal three core values into my teaching, I provide students with an enriching learning environment and prepare them for successful future professional endeavors.

I feel the classroom should be a Community all members want to enter. Ownership in the classroom promotes and fosters participation. A strong identity enhances learning. Ownership and identity are key characteristics for developing leadership skills. Technical information is critical to completing an engineering task, but equally important is students' ethical and leadership development. By acting as a community, students develop the ability to think holistically, work productively, and cultivate a sense of responsibility for their own behaviors. Through practicing these technical and personal attributes within the supportive teaching arena, students build confidence and prepare themselves for the demands of the professional community. Without Community, I believe a learning institution does not have the strength or structure to support all the essential goals of higher education. I introduce and promote the characteristics of Community in my teaching to the students by emphasizing report writing and presentations for classes, like I do for CVEG 4863 "Sustainability in Civil Engineering" at the University of Arkansas, for instance. By working in groups on these projects, students gain ownership of their portion of the project, build identity for recognizing the tasks at which they excel, and form a community where all participants know their strengths. Fostering Community in the classroom allows students to function on multi-disciplinary teams and strengthen their communication and interpersonal skills, all skills essential in any job environment.

The second core value I foster in the classroom is Understanding. Each member of the Community should actively understand himself or herself as well as the other members of the group. The students, as well as the instructor, are encouraged to be informed, sympathetic, and compassionate towards those around them. By cultivating Understanding, students develop cohesion with one another, widen the door of their knowledge, and enhance their personal development. Students learn to understand personal and professional perspectives and values plus develop an openness to new ideas. By understanding themselves and those around them, the students develop a greater awareness as well as stronger commitment and respect for their own values. One way I enhanced my Understanding was by participating in a two-year Post Doctoral Research Fellowship at Southeast University in Nanjing, China. From my two-year international and intercultural experience, I learned how to look at problems from unique perspectives and to use new tools to handle unexpected and unfamiliar challenges as they arose.

Neither Community nor Understanding, however, can be achieved without Awareness. I have observed and firmly believe from personal experience that if we remain alert in observing and interpreting what we see and hear, information flows smoothly. By practicing cognizance and sensibility, learning comes naturally. Through Awareness, people also build higher-order thinking skills. Through practicing Awareness in the

classroom, students learn how to apply principles they already know to new problems and situations, improve their listening skills, and strengthen their self-esteem and self-confidence. My cognizance of Awareness grew extensively from my experience at the Illinois Leadership Center (ILC) at the University of Illinois. In addition to being a Civil Engineering Research Assistant, I was a Graduate Assistant at the ILC for one year, a participant in all five of their I-Programs (Insight, Intersect, Ignite, Imprint, and Integrity), and a facilitator at four of their I-Programs. These programs centered around concepts of personal knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, leading formal groups and organizations, personal and professional transitions, and interpersonal and organizational ethical leadership development. The experience of personally moving through these programs, and then helping lead others through these programs, opened new windows of Awareness into, not only myself, but the people around me as well. Awareness is critical for all engineering students and it will help them every day, whether it be in a class, an internship, or employment after graduation.

In summary, I believe a classroom is an incredible arena for personal, social, and professional growth, and this growth can be achieved to a large extent through Community, Understanding, and Awareness in the classroom. I aspire to convey and will continue to seek knowledge through these three personal core values. My ability to promote Community, Understanding, and Awareness in the classroom was demonstrated in the Spring 2012 when I was given an "Outstanding Mentor" award from the University of Arkansas for my work with students. It was demonstrated again in the Fall 2012, when I was awarded a "New Faculty Commendation for Teaching Commitment" from the Teaching and Faculty Support Center at the University of Arkansas.