

Dale Olver
Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy is based on the ideas that everyone can learn at any age and that there are many different learning styles and ways to convey information. I have had students from ages 16-63 enrolled in various courses over the past two decades, and it is clear that each student has something to offer. I love when students get excited over new information and are able to communicate their enthusiasm to others!

At Penn State I have had the good fortune to teach courses ranging from first-year seminars to senior-level courses. One thing that is a constant is that students want good information. In freshman-level courses such as Ag 150S and 160S, my colleagues and I focus on basic skills necessary to function at Penn State such as using the email system, developing library skills, and helping students to learn critical thinking abilities. During Animal Science 201 (primarily focusing on sophomores and juniors), the main focus is subject-matter related. Learning the correct terminology about animals, their physiological functions, and how animals and humans relate provides the groundwork for students who are advancing to upper-level Animal Science and Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences courses. Finally, during our department's junior and senior level courses such as dairy management and dairy selection, we focus on integration of information and decision-making. The huge amount of available data and the financial impacts of management choices often present daunting challenges. It is essential that students learn to evaluate credibility and economic impacts to be successful in agriculture or other fields. We help do this by using case studies, visits to outstanding operations, industry speakers, and many group projects to integrate a variety of skills and information. I have found that many students have some difficulty adjusting from a "memorization" mindset to a more problem-solving approach. As they progress through our courses they learn to work in teams, evaluate data, and defend their decisions and plans through both oral and written presentations.

Many of the most valuable lessons for our students do not come from textbooks. As a co-advisor for the Dairy Science Club, we encourage students to work in teams, set goals, and develop plans to be successful. It is easy to get into a mentality of "we always do it this way," but our group works hard to refine events to make them better and more efficient. The leadership and communications skills offered by club involvement are valuable complements to students' academic backgrounds. We encourage our members to learn from each other and through interaction with industry leaders. We also try to greatly enhance their Penn State experience by traveling to other areas of the nation and the world. In April over 40 members visited Ireland to learn about their culture and agricultural enterprises, and in 2012 our group traveled to California. We are in a global economy, and we do anything we can to help students understand their interrelationships worldwide. Additionally, our club has taken a very active approach to youth education and interacts with almost 1000 4-H and FFA members each year through quiz bowls, judging contests, and workshops. Finally, our students learn to serve the community through activities such as Spring Bargain Fling (a fundraiser for Big Brothers/Big Sisters), Osteochallenge (a race that supports the National Osteoporosis Foundation), and donations to the Food Bank.

I definitely believe academic knowledge is important. However, for many students the most valuable things they learn in college are things such as teamwork, leadership, communications skills, and critical thinking/decision-making abilities. These are the skills that last a lifetime, and I strive to encourage students to maximize these opportunities through their courses and extracurricular activities.