

# CTE Today

A Newsletter for  
Teachers at USMA

Center for Teaching Excellence

August 2006

## First Weeks of Class

### Developing Rapport in the First Few Weeks

*Dr. Mark Evans, CTE Director*

Okay, we have all been in the classroom for a few weeks now. The first week is easy; everyone is excited about the new beginning, a chance to work on a clean slate. The pressures of mid-terms are not yet here and we all, cadets and instructors, have high hopes and expectations. Now is the time to nurture the relationships that, once established, will successfully take you through to lesson 40 and TEEs. Now is the time to develop good rapport with your cadets.

Let's first establish that nothing is more important in your course than the content that you are teaching and that the cadets are learning. Joseph Lowman (references on p.4) does a great job of describing the relationship between content and how it is delivered on the one hand, and your relationship with your cadets on the other. He puts these together in his two-dimensional model of teaching and shows how both are important to student learning. However, given that you are all subject matter experts and great communicators in the classroom, then the critical ingredient to enhancing cadet learning, is rapport.

In the first few weeks, you set the tone for the 40-lesson course. Along with all the course content you are teaching, the first weeks are important to show cadets:

That you are a professional, a team player, and that you respect the other team members (other academic departments, DPE, DMI, Tacs, Comm, etc.)

That you value class time and use it well.

That your plans for classroom time have a purpose.

That you value cadet time outside of your class.

That you love your subject and love teaching it.

That you truly do enjoy teaching cadets and spending time with them.

That you are interested in cadets as individuals.

That you are willing to solicit cadet input and act on it when possible.

That you want to learn their names and perhaps a bit about their lives or interests.

You want to establish an environment where cadets feel a slight tension by the importance of the material and the pace of the course — this adds to intel-

lectual excitement. Cadets will not value a course where the material is too dull or the pace is too slow. At the same time, you want to establish an environment where cadets believe they are respected, where cadets feel comfortable taking risks and asking questions, and one where either they enjoy and have fun in class, or where they are excited by the content, or both!

So, maintain the pace and rigor of your course, but have a little fun in class and get to know your cadets. Tell them something about you and your interests, both professional and extracurricular. Treat your cadets like you would want your college-age son or daughter to be treated. Establish a relationship where they are comfortable coming to you for guidance.

Go out there and have fun in the classroom!



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#### Conferences

Teaching Professor Conference, May 18-20, 2007, Atlanta, GA  
<http://www.teachingprofessor.com/>

Students in Transition, Nov. 3-5, 2006, St. Louis, MO  
<http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/sit/index.html>

The First Year Experience, July 24-27, Toronto, Canada  
<http://www.sc.edu/fye/events/international/index.html>

# Developing a Statement of Teaching Philosophy, by Dr. Mark D. Evans

Teaching is a scholarly activity when it is: purposeful, reflective, documented, evaluated, and shared. There is no better way to begin framing your scholarship of teaching than to write a personal statement of your own teaching philosophy. The teaching philosophy statement helps one to develop the framework of the teacher that he or she wants to be. The written statement helps the teacher to remain focused in a hectic, changing environment. It helps to develop a dialog between teachers and leaders regarding one's teaching initiatives and activities. A written teaching philosophy, if shared, will help cadets understand the teacher's methods and attitudes and will help cadets to see their role as learners. Finally, a teaching philosophy statement can help teachers to grow as professional educators.

If your leadership is asking you to write a teaching philosophy statement, whether they want you to share it with them or not, they are communicating that "teaching is important in this organization" and that "your growth as a teacher is important to me". What a great opportunity to start a conversation about teaching with department leaders or with a teaching mentor not in your rating chain. Make it a meaningful conversation not filled with platitudes, but really getting into the details of you, your classroom activities, your goals as a teacher, and your interaction with cadets. The teaching philosophy statement will help you to organize these thoughts, document them for your continued reference, and provide a forum for sharing and discussion.

A 1-2 page, living document that describes YOU in the classroom, your behaviors and motivations

Your teaching philosophy statement is a tool that should benefit you, your cadets, and your leaders. Consider all three perspectives when you develop your statement. When you write it, first write from your perspective (after all, it is about YOU), but go back and read it from the perspective of your cadets and your leaders, even if you do not intend to share it with

them. Put yourself in the student role and read your own statement. How would you respond to this teacher and her methods in the classroom? Would you feel comfortable taking risks in class? Would you learn better? Would you be more motivated to continue to explore this course material if you had YOU as a teacher? Really critically evaluate your statement from your cadet's perspective, then do the same from

Write it from your perspective, but review it from the cadet's perspective and from a mentor's perspective

your leader's perspective and revise if necessary. Use caution, however, in over embellishing your teaching philosophy for your leaders. This is not your vitae where you showcase your myriad accomplishments as a teacher. This document is a place to describe your philosophy as a teacher. If you have trouble separating the personal you from the public you, then write two statements if you feel the need. The one I will be referring to in this article is the personal one that truly describes you as a teacher.

Organize your thoughts before you write and consider yourself as both a learner and a teacher. What motivates you to learn? How do you learn best? What enhancements or constraints influence your learning? What teaching outcomes do you hope for? What student-teacher relationship do you strive for? How do you know when you are getting through to your cadets? What methods, attitudes, behaviors, activities that you use are most successful? What values do you want to impart to your cadets? How do you assess your success as a teacher? How do you plan to improve? Give thought to these and other questions and write out your responses – you can later trim portions down to incorporate into your teaching philosophy.

Your written teaching philosophy statement should be 1 to 2 pages long. Consider it a living, working document always subject to inspection and change. The statement should be individual and reflective, it should describe your beliefs and attitudes and a teacher. Generally write in first per-

son narrative (I see myself as ...) but by all means, be creative. If you see yourself in the role of (prominent figure in history or your field), then weave in such references if they add clarity to your statement. Some English teachers might find poetry a good option – it is a personal statement, make it personal. Describe YOU in the classroom, your behaviors and motivations. Avoid sweeping platitudes (I advocate active learning...). Of course you advocate active learning, but how do you accomplish it in your classroom? Remember, while this statement is about you, it is about how you influence cadet learning and development.

You should customize your teaching philosophy statement to suit your needs and unique circumstances, but typical components include: A description of why you teach. What motivates you to teach? How is your teaching related to your other professional development activities? What

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behaviors do you engage in as a teacher. Why? What learning environment, methods, strategies and practices do you employ? How do you evaluate effectiveness? What tools or feedback do you use? What are your plans for continued growth as a teacher?

Finally, since you might share the statement (with a mentor, cadets, leaders, etc.), it should be clear and informative. It should paint a clear picture of you as a teacher, rich with specific details. Try to make it at least somewhat interesting to read. Include a bit of relevant teaching and learning-related jargon. Do not overdo it, and do not try to impress, but your statement will be more useful if written using appropriate educator jargon.

## References:

How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy, Gabriela Montell, The Chronicle of Higher Education, 27 Mar 2003.

How to Write a Teaching Philosophy for Academic Employment, American Chemical Society Dept of Career Services, Washington, DC, 2000.

# Sylvanus Thayer and the Thayer System, by Dr. Mark D. Evans

Sylvanus Thayer was born in Braintree, MA the 5<sup>th</sup> of 7 children raised on Puritan ideals. He put himself through Dartmouth College, working as a teacher, and graduated valedictorian in 1807. He easily passed USMA entrance exams in 1807 and graduated from USMA and secured his commission in 1808. It was common at that time for cadets with previous college experience to secure commissions in one or two years, as Thayer did.

Sylvanus Thayer (1785-1871)  
Dartmouth College—1807  
USMA—1808  
Supt: 1817-1833

Thayer fought in the War of 1812 and was not favorably impressed by what he observed as cowardice and lack of professionalism on the part of many officers. This experience began his thinking into what a proper military education should entail. After the war, he spent two years in Europe studying fortifications when the war department called him back, as a Major, to serve as Superintendent of West Point. Then acting Supt, Alden Partridge, refused to step down and even had a number of professors arrested for conspiring against him. But Thayer took control, tightened up discipline, and established his system for education and cadet development.

USMA was not a 4-year institution at that time. Cadets attended and studied until they were ready for commissioning. Before Thayer, West Point was gaining a reputation as a floundering school for boys from wealthy families. One of Thayer's first actions as Supt, was to organize the cadets into 4 groups, not based on their time at West Point, but on their academic ability at the time. From that point on, USMA became a common 4 year experience for all. Thayer instituted general exams for all cadets. Within a few years, Thayer turned public opinion and West Point became the premier engineering school in the United States. Thayer modeled USMA after some aspects of the Ecole Polytechnique, instituting small classes for daily recitation for content evaluation, developing leadership, and fostering competition among cadets. Classes were kept

small and frequently re-sectioned by ability so that each cadet could demonstrate by blackboard recitation that he had mastered the lesson's material before moving onto the next day's lesson. There were no lectures given by the professor.

Thayer instituted a strict discipline structure. All cadets ate, dresses, drilled, etc. according to Thayer's specifications. Thayer forbade lying, stealing, use of tobacco, long hair, novels, musical instruments, playing cards, bathing more than once per week, and a number of other "irregular or immoral practices". Because there were insufficient officers to enforce Thayer's regulations, Thayer formed the cadets into companies and bestowed rank on cadets to maintain discipline, thus, forming the beginning of the cadet leader development system in place today.

Thayer regularized the cadet schedule, mandated high standards of appearance, weekly chapel, and a strict enforcement of rules. This combination of rules and practices became known as the Thayer system. Thayer emphasized producing disciplined, obedient, technically proficient, civic-minded engineers. His four-pronged approach was to: 1. Develop a uniform military experience for all, regardless of class or family status; 2. Instill deep discipline; 3. Initiate a religious revival (mandatory chapel) to undermine the cadet attitude that chafed against infringements to personal liberty; and 4. Institute a formal course in moral philosophy.

Classes were kept small and frequently re-sectioned ...  
each cadet demonstrated by recitation his mastery ...  
There were no lectures by professors

Horace Mann (prominent educator of his time) said of his visit to USMA (1849) that he "rarely if ever [had] seen anything that equaled the excellence of the teaching or the proficiency of the taught."

Thayer later recommended a complete overhaul of the USMA system in 1865, but even Thayer could not compete with the

mystique that had grown up around his name. As Thayer feared, USMA dropped from the ranks of the nation's leading engineering schools after the civil war (1860-1866). Thayer was concerned that developments made possible by specialization were not being incorporated into USMA. USMA officials visited Harvard and MIT and, in 1873, Prof Peter Michie reported that MIT's labs were of "no value other than to educate the hand and the eye in the use and application of apparatus". The system of majors and specialization was later instituted at USMA, but much later than Thayer recommended.

Thayer served as Superintendent for 16 years, from the age of 32, as a Major, from 1817-1833. He was known as a cold, severe disciplinarian. Thayer lived 1785 – 1871, dying at the age of 86.

## References:

"School for Soldiers, West Point and the Profession of Arms", Joseph Ellis and Robert Moore, Oxford University Press, NY, 1974.

"Military Education, Past, Present, and Future", Chapter 4, "Sylvanus Thayer and Ethical Instruction of Nineteenth-Century Military Officers in the US, by Lori Bogle Edited by Gregory C Kennedy and Keith Neilson, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2002.



## CTE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

<i>COL Sweeney</i>	<i>BS&amp;L</i>
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Advanced Technology Classroom  
Laboratory (ATCL), 120 Thayer Hall

## CTE Purpose and Mission

The purpose of the CTE is to enhance cadet intellectual development through high quality faculty development programs.

The mission of the CTE is to:

- ... provide consultation and resources to faculty
- ... conduct educational research & development
- ... serve as a conduit for educational information

We are on the web:

<http://www.dean.usma.edu/centers/cte/>

**“People don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”**

*Congressman Jack Kemp*

## ATCL, Advanced Technology Classroom Laboratory

*The ATCL (120 TH) is available for you to teach your sections in. Cadets have access to tablet computers while in the ATCL along with TurningPoint Student Response System, ipods, and other technology. If such technology would improve teaching and learning in your classes, contact the CTE to schedule. Contact Mr. Jeff Rohrlack for more information.*

## TEACHING-RELATED REFERENCES FOR ALL FACULTY TO CONSIDER

- Angelo, T. A., and Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Bloom, B. S., ed. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives*, Longman, New York.
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- Wankat, P. C., and Oreovicz, F. S. (1993). *Teaching engineering*, McGraw-Hill, New York. (Note: useful for all disciplines)
- Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Kauchak, and Gibson (1994). *Teaching Strategies, A guide to Better Instruction*, D.C. Heath and Co., Lexington, MA.
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## Newsletter Submissions

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**Submissions** to *CTE Today* are welcome and encouraged. When submitting, please keep these guidelines in mind:

...We are interested in a wide range of teaching and learning topics.

...We are interested in innovative strategies, techniques, and approaches that facilitate learning

...We are interested in reflective analyses of educational issues of concern.

...Write with the understanding that your audience includes faculty in a wide variety of disciplines and in a number of different departments.

...What you describe must be relevant to a significant proportion of USMA faculty.

...Write directly to the audience, remembering that this is a newsletter, not a journal publication.

...Keep the article short; generally between 1 and 3 double-spaced pages.

...If you’d like some initial feedback on a topic you’re considering, you’re welcome to share it electronically with the editor.