



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY
West Point, New York 10996

REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

MADN-MATH

27 July 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR MAJ Y's XXYYYY Students

SUBJECT: Teaching Philosophy

1. Communication is a *very* important part of any relationship. I would like to begin our relationship with a brief look into my ideas about the profession of teaching, giving you an idea of how you can expect this semester to unfold.

2. What is teaching? I believe that teaching is the art of giving students what they need to be able to learn. I don't believe that teaching is consistently standing in front of a class with an agenda and lecturing on a topic. I certainly don't believe in teaching to a certain test. Each student is unique, possibly requiring different information, classroom approaches, or even different amounts of time. A teacher assesses what students need and provides for those needs.

3. Why teach? I choose to teach because I want to make a positive impact. Our world is busy and complex, with many competing influences and distractions. With my experience as an officer, a leader, and a mathematician, I believe that I can help students be successful in the world that awaits them.

4. Why teach math? I teach math because I believe that aptitude in mathematics is a powerful and relevant skill. I use mathematics as a framework to teach students to solve problems analytically, whether they involve numbers or not. The ability to break a problem into its most basic pieces, solve the problem, then communicate the solution to a non-mathematician has served me well in my military career. I want to show you how it can serve you well in yours.

5. Mathematics as a language. I believe that mathematics is a language, just like English, French, or Japanese. It tells a story...the letters and numbers are the basic building blocks, the equations are sentences, the word problems the paragraphs. Mathematics is a language that is truly worldwide, because it is based in universal truths. If you understand the language of mathematics, it is possible to have a whole new world opened up to you.

a. Henry Ford said, "If you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right."

b. Too many people see math work and immediately say "I can't." Be open...let me show you that you *can*.

6. My goals as your teacher...my A, B, Cs of teaching: Assess, Be available, & Communicate.

a. Assess. I seek to continually assess where we are as a class, throughout the semester. This assessment, through checking of "DO" problems, completion of board problems, and quizzes will help me in focusing what the class needs that day.

(1) “Muddiest Point” cards. Periodically, I will hand out index cards on which you can write down the items that are your “muddiest point,” that is, the one topic you are not “getting”.

(2) After Action Reports (AARs). After each Written Partial Review (WPR) and project, we will conduct AARs to determine what the class should change and what should stay the same.

b. Be available. When I am in my office, I am yours. Come see me anytime, I *mean* it. If you want to guarantee that I am in my office, e-mail or phone me to schedule a meeting.

c. Communicate. We’ll talk about math at the “nuts and bolts” level. Albert Einstein said that any fool can make a concept more complicated. If we work together, we can make math easy to understand, Einstein’s definition of “true genius”.

(1) Our first responsibility at USMA is to produce officers of character. We will discuss issues that are on your mind or on my mind that pertain to officership and professional development. We’ll talk about current events. Candid discussion of what is going on in the world will help us make better decisions when we are faced with similar problems in the future.

(2) The math. I will make the math easy (and fun!) to understand. We’ll break it down to the nuts and bolts, and we’ll incorporate real problems that apply to your life and interests.

6. Your Responsibilities.

a. Be Prepared. I expect you to come to my class knowing what you don’t know. That may mean doing the reading and executing the “DO” problems. It may mean something else. Know what you don’t know...”Sir, I don’t get it” is not the response I am looking for. The more specific you are, the more successful we will be in getting you past a given obstacle.

b. Be Professional. Know the standards set by the Army and USMA. You will adhere to these standards, the same as I will. If you choose not to meet or follow a given standard, expect to hear about it.

c. Be Ready. Together, we can make math class an hour you look forward to every day!

7. See the undersigned with any questions, Thayer Hall, Room XXX, 938-0000.

Major Y
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Sciences