

How to construct a model instructor

A HANDFUL OF US got profound the other night, trying to understand the techniques of Institute teaching. We ended up by creating a model instructor—one we've only seen bit by bit. Constantly we hear that it doesn't matter who the instructor is if the students will go after the subject. Still, we'd like to register for our model man's course next term.

"First of all, this model instructor should be eager to teach the subject matter. This spark of eagerness is transmitted to the class . . ."


"A great instructor stalks into class with the main points to be covered firmly in mind before he starts speaking. He uses some legitimate ploy to command attention (like maintaining tight class discipline). Then, speaking clearly, he begins to make his points till the class loses the thread. Because this class is in an atmosphere where a student can say, 'Hey, wait, I don't understand,' or 'Stop, you made a mistake,' the instructor stops. He doesn't consider this interruption a personal affront to his competence (this calls for maturity—which it is not unfair to expect of a man who

is instructing); he explains the point. Then he's off again, offering his main points and buttressing them with a hundred vignettes from the outside world to get the student to think of and with these new ideas . . ."

"If he puts his foot in his mouth—or worse, puts it not much of any place at all—he backs off gracefully and pins down his meaning. He doesn't bother to create the childish myth of instructor-infallibility. (We have begun to see even our fathers as fallible people; we don't need any new heroes to fill in the gap)."

"The soul of imagination is novelty. The masterful instructor has real command over *novelty* and *imagination*. One is a fickle maiden to be seduced by the other. *Imagination* in the student's mind is courted by a balanced combination of routine and *novelty*. Our instructor sets up a routine of homework, quizzes and class procedures. For novelty he depends on human applications of his subject matter or ingenious and intellectually 'pretty' steps, a little beyond the student at present. These *and* others will excite the young man, maybe, with a lust for untried fields of learning. . . ."

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"One prime asset of the good instructor is secret because others are unconscious of it. This is the difference between learning alone and learning from living men. This is communication with the students beyond handing over the subject matter of the course. The instructor is master of the subject matter, so he can be probing the student reaction to it. In this way he *can* maintain a continuous evaluation of the student's progress. This means that the actual test will serve mainly as a goad to the student, rather than as a measuring tool. The man who finds this contact easiest hasn't any barrier between him and the student. The man who fails to come up to this measure has a huge barrier to vault. He might try being friendly with the guy while putting over his points. The student is ignorant or he wouldn't be taking the course. Let's not confuse his ignorance with his low intelligence. The student didn't pay tuition for a theatrical display of arrogance. . . ."

In our profundity, we assumed a student who is somewhat interested in the courses offered; let's say he's pulling a low C average. He is right in the area where a good instructor can do the most. He'll lay out his brain to be inoculated, and nothing more, until he blunders onto a man who seems to take an interest in him as well as his subject. This student will work for a guy like that, ignoring the credits offered, even giving the ultimate: thinking about the subject while he is lolling around on Saturday nights.

If the instructor can manage this, he's laid the groundwork for some fresh, new accomplishment in the field, and has gained one kind of immortality.

—Russ Hunter '57

Alumni Seminar Day

THE 19TH ANNUAL Alumni Seminar Day will be held on Saturday, April 7. Committee members working out plans for the event are: Hugh Carter '49, director in charge; C. W. Lindsay '35, chairman, Alumni Seminar committee; Raymond E. Cox '27, chairman, catering; Richard A. Andrews '42, chairman, registration; Howard B. Lewis, Jr. '48, arrangements; and Wesley Hertenstein '25, Institute relations. Arthur Schneider '42 is chairman of the program committee, assisted by John T. Bowen '42, Horace W. Baker '35, L. Fort Etter '34, John L. Mason '47 and Paul D. Saltman '49.

Although program arrangements are not yet complete, early plans include a symposium of three speakers—Drs. William Fowler, Jesse Greenstein, and possibly Fred Hoyle, of Cambridge University in England—who will discuss the creative processes of the universe. Also scheduled is Dr. William Pickering, who will talk on earth satellites.

San Francisco Dinner Dance

THE SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER of the Caltech Alumni Association will hold its Pre-Spring Dinner Dance March 2 on Treasure Island, as guests of Ensign Walter Eager '53. Beginning with a social hour at 6:30 and dinner at 7:30 (choice of prime ribs or lobster), the dance will be held in the Treasure Room of the Treasure Island Officer's Club. The cost per couple is \$8.50. For reservations or more information about the dance, call Don Loeffler (50 Overlook Court, Walnut Creek), whose telephone number is YE 4-9240.

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