

My Philosophy as a Professor, Educator, and Researcher

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I think that everyone's approach to their profession is shaped by their worldview. Their worldview may be explicitly articulated, or it may be (as is most often the case) implicit. As a Christian, my philosophy as a professor is defined by my commitment to God as revealed in the Bible. I believe that the Bible must have a strong bearing on all areas of my life, including my career. In this paper I attempt to articulate my frame of reference as a Christian professor.

Commitment to Truth - As a professor I am committed to the truth. That means that in my research I try to arrive at basic truth (which is often mathematical) that has some relation to engineering systems. As an educator I communicate scientific truth to my students, and I am careful to distinguish between fact and unproven theories. I believe that truth is objective. Mathematical theorems are constant, and the physical laws that determine the behavior of the universe do not change from day to day. Similarly, the spiritual laws that govern our relationships with God are unchanging. Science and engineering would be impossible without objective truth. As a Christian I study the Bible (and other writings) to increase my understanding of spiritual truth. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist . . ." (Ephesians 6:14)

Commitment to Application - As an engineering professor I believe that although truth is valuable as an end unto itself, its primary value lies in application. This is what distinguishes me from many professors in the natural sciences (such as physics) and mathematics. In both my research and teaching the reason that I attempt to learn and communicate truth is so that it can be applied (or at least potentially applied) to real engineering systems. As a Christian I believe that God has communicated truth to humankind through both nature and the Bible. While this truth is valuable as an end unto itself, God has not communicated it to us as a purely academic exercise. He has revealed truth to us so that it can be applied in our lives. Knowledge of the Bible is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a successful life. Personal application of Biblical principles is a necessary and sufficient condition for a successful life. "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

Commitment to People - As a professor I am committed to sharing the results of my research with the engineering community through conferences and journal publications. As an educator I am committed to relating to students in such a way as to effectively communicate knowledge to them. But I am committed not only to educating students, but also to being available to help them in any way that they need. As a Christian I

believe that the only tangible thing on this earth that lasts forever is people, whom God has created in his image. As I see God's great commitment to people it motivates me to also be committed to others. Like many engineers I am often more comfortable in my lab or with my computer than with other humans. But as a Christian I go out of my way to be involved with others in my work as a professor.

Commitment to Integrity - Ethics is required in engineering, teaching, research, and all areas of life. I am committed to "provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17). As a teacher I make a conscious decision to treat all students respectfully and fairly. As a researcher I place a high importance on integrity in both the conduct and dissemination of my work. This includes generating and presenting research results in a way that does not mislead those who view my work. Researchers are tempted to present only positive results rather than the entire picture in order to put the best possible spin on their work. I make a conscious effort to avoid this type of half-truth. As I communicate my work in writing I am also committed to properly giving credit to others whose work I have used.

Commitment to Progress - Life in academia is a life of change and progress. I am committed to continuing the learning process for the rest of my life. In my research I continually delve deeper into those areas with which I am already conversant, and I seek to expand into other areas to broaden my knowledge. As an educator I continually refine my teaching style, methods, and materials to better communicate with my students. As a Christian I daily learn more about God and his will for my life. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal . . ." (Philippians 3:13-14)

Commitment to Perseverance - Great things are accomplished only with perseverance. This is a corollary to my commitment to progress as discussed above. As a professor I am committed to perseverance as I try to increase my understanding and generate research results. I often have had to read and re-read books and journal articles six or eight times before I understood them. I have had to rewrite and resubmit papers three or four times before they were published. As a Christian I am also committed to perseverance. My primary goal is to know God and to live a life that is pleasing to God. Practically speaking, this is an objective that is impossible to completely meet. Every day I fall short in some way. But as I persevere I can asymptotically approach the goal. "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)

Commitment to Tolerance - In the academic world there are many who hold views different than mine; they may believe that my research direction is not worthwhile, or they may disagree with the conclusions of my research. In academic meetings professors often disagree as we attempt to persuade others to our point of view. Hopefully these disagreements can be expressed in an agreeable manner. As a professor I am committed to tolerating the viewpoints of others. That includes attempting to

understand their opinions and perspectives and offering them the same respect that I hope to receive. In the religious world there are many who hold views different than mine; they may adhere to a religion other than Christianity, or they may believe that God does not even exist. Even among Christians there are strong disagreements with respect to religious beliefs and practices. As a Christian I must extend tolerance and acceptance towards other religious views. Tolerance is not often associated with religion in general or Christianity in particular. This is an unfortunate result of an all-too-often unbalanced commitment to truth. But the Bible is clear that as I follow Christ I must tolerate others as I am humbly aware of my own shortcomings. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." (Ephesians 4:2)

Commitment to Balance - As a professor I need to find the right balance between teaching, research, grant work, and service. There are enough demands to work full-time in any one of these areas. But I must seek to balance my time so that I can fulfill my responsibilities in each area without neglecting the others. In both my research and teaching I seek to balance theory with practice. As a Christian I need to find the right balance in life. That includes setting aside adequate time and energy for my family, my career, my spiritual life, and relationships. Another area in which balance is required is in the various commitments discussed in this paper. For instance, I need to balance my commitment to truth with my commitment to tolerance. That means that I can believe in absolute truth while still maintaining respect for others with differing views. I can disagree with my colleagues without being disagreeable, and I can even argue without being argumentative.

Note: All Biblical quotations are taken from the New International Version, copyright 1978 by the New York International Bible Society.