



Dr. Stephen Davis training research students in plant diversity and physiology in the San Jacinto Mountains. Dr. Davis is retiring after 46 years of teaching, mentoring, and partnering in research scholarships with Pepperdine students.

The Legacy of a Teacher

Looking back upon influential people in our lifelong journey, teachers are often prominent on that list. Teachers choose to spend their time and energy investing in the elevation of others. As we enter

Teacher Appreciation Week 2022, we should take a moment to consider teachers who were particularly influential in each of our lives. Those teachers who noticed you in the crowd, who listened to your story, and who might have given you a nudge to step forward.

In my own experience, I think of a biology professor in college. He was my teacher in several classes, but I had also served as his laboratory teaching assistant, and he was the residential faculty host in the dorms where I served as a resident assistant. Our lives intersected multiple times each day. I respected his patient approach in dealing with unruly students, his incredible depth of insight into biomedical science, and his earnest expressions of faith. In my junior year, he invited me to join him in attending an open house event for a local graduate program in biomedical research. I was a bit perplexed as I did not consider myself as an appropriate candidate for such a program, but this was an invitation from a respected professor. During the open house we were able to tour research laboratories at the facility. I was like a child being invited into Willy Wonka's chocolate factory as we met with research faculty, learned about their field of study, and explored their impressive laboratories. To gain admission to this kind of environment seemed unreachable to me, but as we drove back to campus the professor encouraged me to seriously consider graduate school. His encouragement and influence changed the direction of my life. I was able to return to visit him about 10 years ago, just before his retirement. As we spent some time together and shared stories, he did not recall the open house, but smiled when I offered my gratitude for his influence in my life and certainly many other lives.

Teachers are at the very heart of Pepperdine's influence and purpose. The student experience is shaped by relationship with faculty mentors. We highlight the good work of our faculty in varied ways, but to be honored as an exceptional teacher is our very highest faculty honor. As our graduating students traverse the stage at commencement ceremonies this spring, their accomplishment of an earned diploma is a focused moment of pride and completion. Faculty celebrate this moment as well, noting the hard work of each student, and knowing the academic journey of students in detail. There is some melancholy as we note the departure of graduates from our midst, but we look forward to their return as alumni. When they do return, they will likely seek out those faculty mentors who partnered with them during challenging times, who gave them a nudge to meet the challenge, and to dream big.

"When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things." (Mark 6:34 (NASB))

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Provost
