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## An electoral lecture

The classic whispered advice to new professors goes something like this: focus on researching and publishing; spending too much time on teaching can hamper your career. "I've heard that," says Dennis Jacobs, professor of chemistry at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. But he's chosen to ignore it. Jacobs was last month named US professor of the year for research and doctoral universities by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Over the years, Jacobs has tweaked his courses to make them less reliant on lectures and memorizing facts. For example, in his introductory chemistry course he talks briefly about a concept — how various bonds are formed, for example. Before he performs an experiment to demonstrate the concept, he asks students to predict an outcome — perhaps whether the temperature of the solution will rise, fall or stay the same. He then asks them to discuss their theory with their neighbours and vote. Next, he canvasses the lecture hall for different answers. After the opinions are aired, he asks for another vote, performs the experiment and discusses the outcome.

Preparing this type of lecture takes a lot of work, and his colleagues have asked whether it is worth the effort. So, after overhauling his course for the first time a few years ago, he tried his new approach on only one group, and compared long-term outcomes of the students with the modified and standard teaching styles. Not surprisingly, students that he has tracked from the modified class did better overall in other chemistry classes than those who received the more standard instruction.

Perhaps such data — and awards that acknowledge similar successes — will also turn teaching into something that is emphasized, rather than swept aside.

**Paul Smaglik**  
Naturejobs editor



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