

In Memoriam: James E. Stice

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Many years ago I heard John Prausnitz tell the “who is Prausnitz” story. In short, it is a commentary about the arc of a successful career, where initially no one knows who Prausnitz is (because he is brand new to the field), while eventually (at the end of a career), despite a very (very) lengthy list of accomplishments, the new faculty in the field have (for the most part) never heard of Prausnitz (and only those who have built on his work).

With the recent passing of James “Jim” Stice, Bob R. Dorsey Professor Emeritus in Engineering at The University of Texas, I am reminded of the Prausnitz story.

Across the US (and beyond), departments, colleges and universities are committing resources towards teacher training and engineering education. Indeed, my *alma mater*, the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, started an Engineering Education department a few years ago. However, a year before Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, the idea to start a “Bureau of Engineering Teaching” was born at The University of Texas, with Jim Stice at the helm.

I would encourage all to read a little more about the trailblazer who was Jim Stice. *Chemical Engineering Education* has [profiled him in 1991](#)^[1] (in the article you can read about the founding of NETI) and Rich Felder devoted a [Random Thoughts column](#)^[2] to Prof. Stice on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

Personally, I don’t think I have ever met Prof. Stice, but I did attend a workshop (or presentation – I can’t recall) that he gave when I was at the beginning of my career. Little did he know that the information he shared would be the “go to” suggestion I provide to anyone who asks me for the “one piece of advice” to improve their teaching. This advice was to “write learning objectives for the course”. And those learning objectives must be observable and measurable – I am still loathed to write/say the word “understanding” when considering anything related to learning.

I will conclude this tribute to Prof. Stice with his own words that appear in his directory page at The University of Texas. I do not know when he wrote them, but I do hope as a profession we can make more meaningful strides in this area over the next decade.



Photo courtesy of the McKetta Department of Chemical Engineering, The University of Texas at Austin

“Through the years, I have been fascinated by the challenges of engineering education and my primary interest is developing programs that teach college engineering instructors to be effective educators. Few universities offer courses in teaching at the college level because the prevailing philosophy is that graduate teaching experience and knowledge of a subject are sufficient preparation. They are not. Graduate teaching assistants limited to helping with a laboratory course or leading a discussion group for a large lecture class do not gain broad experience in effective educational practices; many engineering instructors enter the teaching field largely unprepared for their new careers. Structured training in educational philosophy and technique gives graduate students critical preparation for a teaching career, the opportunity to examine the field of engineering education closely, and to choose a career in it more wisely.”^[3]

REFERENCES

1. CEE Staff. (1991) Jim Stice of the University of Texas. *Chem. Eng. Ed.* 25(1):6-9. <https://journals.flvc.org/cee/article/view/123995>
2. Felder RM (2009). Random thoughts: A teacher’s teacher. *Chem. Eng. Ed.* 43(4):313-314. <https://journals.flvc.org/cee/article/view/122301>
3. Faculty webpage for James E. Stice, The University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.che.utexas.edu/people/faculty/stice>. Accessed August 24, 2022. □