

NACTA Presidential Remarks



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As NACTA President for 2013-2014 I would like to begin by thanking the outstanding efforts of the Virginia Tech and Conference Host Committee, led by Dr. 's Rick Rudd, Jim McKenna, and Pavli Mykerezi. You have done an outstanding job organizing conference events at a number of wonderful venues. The exceptional success of this conference begins with support from leadership. I would like to thank Dean, Alan Grant and Associate Dean, Susan Summer of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech University. Their strong support of this conference was instrumental to the success.

A conference of this magnitude also needs financial support and NACTA would like to graciously thank the industry and agency sponsors who supplied many of the Virginia products we had the pleasure of consuming this week.

I would also like to thank you, the participants of the 2013 NACTA Conference. You make this an enjoyable and rewarding week each year.

This is a great time to be a part of NACTA. At the 2013 Conference, we have the most participants in the history of this organization. There is representation from across the U.S., Canada, Puerto Rico, Peru and other countries. This year, was the largest number of submitted abstracts and we have continued our strong partnership with NIFA-DOCE, bringing together teachers from a wide range of scientific disciplines from a broad spectrum of institutions.

What is NACTA about?

NACTA is about Crossing Disciplinary Boundaries. Teaching and learning is the discipline at a NACTA

conference and the subject each of us teach is secondary to how we create a safe learning environment, communicate, and cultivate learners. This week, we have learned to look at the world through different lenses: cultural competency; agricultural production; flipping our classroom or flopping on a new strategy; or finding a friend to Pinterest on our iPads. We look though these lenses for a common goal, to teach students how to become learners. We come together each year to encourage, challenge and educate each other in our common commitment to our craft and chosen profession.

NACTA is about recognizing excellence. Each year we gather to recognize excellence in education. Approximately 50 USDA award winners have come from the ranks of NACTA membership. Excellence does not have any age or experience boundaries. Excellence is found in: a lifetime of commitment as lived out by Ron Hanson; the exuding energy of Nick Fuhrman; the humble servant attitude of David Jones; the lifetime of learning demonstrated by Jim McKenna; the caring attitude of Samantha Ambrose a graduate student who invests in the lives of fellow students; the joy of spending time with students I have seen in Martin Zuidohf; the passion to teach of Kevin Donnelley; the professionalism of Foy Mills; and to setting the bar high as done by Kirby Barrick. We come together each year to celebrate those who have committed to changing lives.

NACTA is about changing lives. As educators, we are in the business of changing lives one person, one relationship at a time. Each of us brings a different discipline to the table but what cuts across our disciplinary boundaries is a desire to be a catalyst which changes a

student from being a passive observer to being an active participant in their education.

We never know when that moment of catalyst will occur so as teachers we must always be prepared. We are always on the clock even when we are in the check-out stand at in our tee-shirt, shorts, glasses and ball cap. A poignant reminder of the impact we can have in the life of a student was in an email I received from a former student just two days ago while preparing this message.

“Dr. Hattey,

I hope all is well! The other day I was thinking about you and your Fundamentals of Soil Science course back at the real OSU [Author note, I am currently at The Ohio State University].

That was the first course I took after switching my major to environmental science, and I have to say I think it changed my life! Haha!

In those days I really didn't know what environmental science was, or soil science for that matter. Anyway, I remember you introducing us to the idea that carbon stored in Arctic permafrost could be decomposed and released to the atmosphere as GHGs in a warming climate. I remember thinking that that was the coolest thing I ever heard and it would be really interesting to research something like that.

So now, four years later, I've just completed my first year of an Earth System Science PhD program at University of California Irvine and am preparing for my first field campaign to the North Slope of Alaska, which begins in a month. I'll be sampling methane emissions from thermokarst lakes at 72 degree latitude. I plan to analyze the methane's radiocarbon content in order to estimate the age of its carbon source. It's amazing to me to think back four years to your class and remember the first time I thought about conducting research in the Arctic- Now it's becoming reality!

Anyway, I just wanted to thank you for the inspiration you gave me while I was at OK State. Your guidance and advice was greatly appreciated and I think it really helped me pursue the work that I am most interested in. Keep up the good work you do for all your students!

*Best Regards,
Clayton E.”*

I remember the lecture Clayton referred to, in an unscripted moment, I made the offhand comment that if global warming models were correct, then the organic matter locked for centuries in the Arctic, would be at risk of escaping into the atmosphere contributing to greenhouse gas levels. What was an offhand comment on my part resonated with Clayton impacting his career path.

I am sure every teacher in this room has a file where you keep letters or emails similar to Clayton's. These are reminders that as educators, we can be a catalyst in the lives of students. What you do makes a difference and NACTA exists to support your impact in the teaching profession.

What is NACTA to You?

I hope for each of you, NACTA is or will become the organization that encourages, challenges and inspires each of you to continue to invest in the lives of the students and colleagues you work with. There is a place for you to contribute in NACTA. We are an organization that is open to new members who are ready to contribute. Join a committee or volunteer to be a reviewer, NACTA is what you make it. We are here to serve those who aspire to excellence in teaching and learning and desire to change lives.

In 2014, I invite you to meet me in Montana where “Learning Runs Through It.” Thank you and Safe Travels.