

2007 National Excellence In Teaching Awards

State and Territory Teaching Excellence Award Recipient



Len Altman

Bachelor of Science (Honours), Diploma of Education, Masters of Education (Studies) Curriculum Development
Marden Senior College, Marden, South Australia

Nominated By: Governing Council

Position: Geoscience, Geology and Physics Teacher • Level taught: Secondary School • School type: Government • Town: Marden • Category: Secondary • State: SA

Mining a rich vein of student potential

Len brings an infectious enthusiasm for science and mathematics to his classes at Marden Senior College. He engages students by placing subjects such as geology and physics into real-life scenarios. He adopts an interdisciplinary approach where questioning, experimenting, and inquiry are highly valued. Through such innovative practices, Len helps to find practical solutions for students whose needs are not met through conventional approaches.

Len has achieved outstanding results with his students. In 2004, his students won the *Australian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy Award* for best production of a website. Len has also led the introduction of the *Geosciences Pathways Project* that uses extensive fieldwork, practical laboratory experiences, and workplace skills, to make careers in geosciences more attractive to students. This has resulted in a 200 per cent increase in student enrolments in geology classes at Marden Senior College. Many of Len's graduating students have been successful in finding immediate employment as field assistants in mining or petroleum exploration.

Insight

Q: In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?

A: Good teachers are reflective, collaborative, have a genuine passion for the curriculum, and have effective skills to promote student engagement and a caring and patient attitude.

Q: How do you maintain your enthusiasm for teaching?

A: By reflecting on student outcomes in the knowledge that I have helped to make the difference to their life-long learning, career development and personal growth.

Q: In hindsight, what do you wish your training provided you with more of?

A: More teaching practicum and clinical supervision, which would have promoted my skills in developing a quality learning environment, student engagement, and reflective practice.

Q: What is the most difficult aspect of teaching today?

A: Managing the balance of preparation, marking and assessment and ongoing professional development, including the learning, testing and trialling of new technologies.

Q: What is your greatest challenge as a teacher?

A: To improve the ways of catering to the diverse ability of students and improving their engagement, particularly at senior secondary level where curriculum statements largely dictate required content.

Q: How has teaching changed over the years?

A: From transmission of 'knowledge' to the development of student capacity to launch effective enquiry and construct knowledge through engagement with a diverse range of modalities.

Q: What is the single most important thing you, as a teacher, can do to connect with individual students?

A: Take as much time as necessary to learn about each student's background, abilities, interests and aspirations, while at the same time developing ongoing two-way communication.

Q: If you were the Minister for Education, Science and Training for a week, what would you try to change?

A: Ensure that students in government schools are encouraged to participate in specialist programs in other schools, without the current disincentive of reduced home school funding.

Q: What keeps you awake at night?

A: The welfare of 'at-risk' students and particularly those (adults) who overload themselves with studies, while balancing demands of their work and family responsibilities.

Q: If your students could describe you in three words, what would they say?

A: Len is understanding of our needs, is caring and always helpful.

Contact Details:

Principal: Chris Dolan
Phone: (08) 8366 2888

Teacher: Len Altman
Phone: 0414 355 128 or (08) 8261 7891 (Science Office)
Email: laltman@mardensc.sa.edu.au

For further information, please contact:

Janet Thomas, Public Relations, ASG on behalf of the NEiTA Foundation.
Telephone: (03) 9276 7758 Mobile: 0402 837 758 Email: publicrelations@asg.com.au

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