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Research Article

The Kingmaker: Effective Teaching Approaches to Agricultural Policy

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Abstract

This study examined the teaching methodology used by Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh in his Agricultural Policy course at Kansas State University for nearly 50 years. Dr. Flinchbaugh was known internationally for agricultural policy and teaching. Ten former students were interviewed and asked a series of questions in a semi-structured format. Through qualitative methods, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the instructional practices, engagement strategies, and approaches that contributed to his impactful teaching career. The findings reveal that Flinchbaugh's teaching approach was characterized by a student-centered approach, emphasizing active engagement, critical thinking, and real-world application. Effective student-teacher interactions, including timely feedback and open dialogue, are also highlighted as crucial aspects of Flinchbaugh's pedagogy. Participants attributed their career success and continued engagement in agricultural policy to the knowledge, skills, and inspiration from Flinchbaugh's course. Overall, this study highlights the significance of exceptional educators in shaping students' educational experiences and emphasizes the continuous improvement of teaching methodologies in higher education.

1 Introduction

In higher education, the influence of professors takes on a profound significance, as it may directly shape a student's educational experience, intellectual development, and future opportunities. Teachers can have positive impacts such as academic program and career choices (Lent, Brown, and Hackett 1994; Bettinger and Long 2005; Looney and Akbulut 2007; Carrell and West 2010; Rask 2010). While these influences predominately occur in the classroom, they can also happen after a particular course concludes through engagement before and after the completion of a degree. Effective teaching practices employed by professors have the potential to inspire students, foster a love for learning, and equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in their chosen fields.

Teaching effectiveness has been closely linked to optimal learning. Chew and Cerbin (2021) articulate that effective teaching goes beyond the mere transmission of information. It involves creating an environment where every student, regardless of their initial interest, can engage, learn, and transform their perception of the world. Successful teachers change their teaching methods based on the students in their classroom, influencing students' motivations and approaches to learning. Various instructional strategies, such as providing constructive feedback, setting clear learning objectives, and promoting student-teacher interactions, have a significant positive impact on student learning (Hattie 2009).

Effective teaching has long been recognized as a critical factor in student and academic success (Cohen 1981; Umbach and Wawrzynski 2005). As universities and colleges strive to provide high-quality education, it becomes pivotal for teachers to create engaging, inclusive, and effective learning environments. Teaching effectiveness varies as students have different expectations for their instructors by academic discipline (Alhija 2017; Bledsoe, South Richardson, and Kalle 2021). Instructor

characteristics often mentioned when defining teaching effectiveness include enthusiasm, care, and engagement (Hativa 2014; Bledsoe et al. 2021). One way teachers are evaluated for their teaching effectiveness is through the documentation of student evaluations of teaching (Stripling, Esteppe, and McClanahan 2020). Previous studies have provided evidence to evaluate teaching performance (Centra 1993; Braskamp and Ory 1994; Campbell 2005; Miller and Seldin 2014; Berk 2018). These studies used various methods of data collection, including questionnaires and surveys, student ratings, peer observations, open-ended questions, student interviews, quality control circles, and focus groups (Berk, Nauman, and Appling 2004; Berk 2005; Berk 2006; Berk 2019). Data from these studies show that student data can be used to evaluate effective teaching, especially as students have more frequent interactions with instructors to judge topics related to the relationship between students and an instructor (Braskamp and Ory 1994).

As instructors strive to enhance their teaching practices, valuable insights can be gained by examining the experiences and perspectives of exceptional educators who have had a profound impact on their students. Barry L. Flinchbaugh, PhD, was a professor of agricultural economics and Extension specialist at Kansas State University since 1969. Dr. Flinchbaugh was internationally known for being an influencer of agricultural policy. Through a career in Cooperative Extension, Dr. Flinchbaugh gained experience working on state tax policy and Kansas agricultural issues. His work eventually led to shaping agricultural policy on the national stage. He chaired the committee on 21st Century of Farming. Policy makers across the country often consulted Dr. Flinchbaugh to strategically reach across the aisle and form legislation. Yet, his most impactful effort was teaching nearly 5,000 students. He taught a junior-level agricultural policy course (AGEC 510 and later AGEC 410) for forty-nine years while at Kansas State. His students would go on to become agribusiness professionals, Capitol Hill staffers, college professors and administrators, state governors, state legislators, and school board superintendents, among other professions. Dr. Flinchbaugh won several teaching awards throughout his career due to his effective teaching and student-centered instruction.

2 Purpose and Objectives

This study focused on the teaching methodology used by Dr. Flinchbaugh in his AGEC 410: Agricultural Policy course over nearly fifty years and the effectiveness of his teaching. To provide context of the content within the course, an outline of Dr. Flinchbaugh's AGEC 410 course can be found in Appendix A. Dr. Flinchbaugh was known for teaching using the alternatives-and-consequences approach to public policy issues (House 1993) where different solutions to problems are analyzed through an objective process. We use a phenomenology approach to reach our objectives. Our results will help inform other instructors on how to approach teaching to be student-focused, especially those in agricultural economics and agribusiness programs and/or those teaching agricultural policy courses.

By conducting interviews with his former students, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the instructional practices, engagement strategies, and approaches that have contributed to his impactful teaching career. The purpose of this study is to identify how students previously enrolled in Agricultural Policy describe Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's pedagogy and its influence on their success as a student and professional. This study will inform and inspire other educators to enhance their teaching practices and create a supportive learning environment. The determination of pedagogical methods and their impacts will enable educators to adopt similar practices to enhance their own approach to teaching, improving student and professional success outcomes.

RQ1: What do former students perceive to be the methods of effective teaching used by Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh in AGEC 410?

RQ2: How do former students perceive the impact of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's teaching methods on their success as a student and a professional?

3 Methods and Data

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological research approach. This approach was chosen in order to explore and empower descriptive stories of interactions between students and Dr. Flinchbaugh (Creswell and Poth 2018). In this case, the phenomenon is the lived experience of the students as they participated in Agricultural Policy class. Similar to the approach of Chuyun Hu (2020), we used interviews to investigate the unique experiences of former AGECE 410 students related to the teaching effectiveness of Dr. Flinchbaugh. Prior to contacting potential participants, we received Human Subjects/Institutional Review Board approval (#IRB-10975).

A phenomenological approach was used because it aligns with our aim to identify common meanings former students share regarding Dr. Flinchbaugh's pedagogy and its influence on them (Creswell and Poth 2018). In brief, "phenomenology is the reflective study of pre-reflective experience, concerned with how people consciously experience phenomena, things, or stuff" (Tracy 2020, p. 65). Whereas the narrative approach is concerned with each individual's story and the grounded theory approach attempts to theoretically explain a shared experience, phenomenology seeks to identify the commonalities across a set of individuals who experienced the same event (Creswell and Poth 2018; Tracy 2020). The phenomenological approach has been used to investigate effective teaching through the eyes of college students (Chuyun Hu 2020), effectiveness of online learning as perceived by college students (Becker and Schad 2022) and faculty (Kabilan and Annamalai 2022), as well as to explore student perspectives of specific teaching approaches (Mangali et al. 2019; McGhee et al. 2019).

Stratified purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify study participants (Creswell and Poth 2018). Stratified purposive sampling was used to identify the initial pool of potential interviewees. We reviewed all available course syllabi for each year Dr. Flinchbaugh taught AGECE 410, looking for the names of former teaching assistants listed on the syllabus, who served as our initial participant pool. Dr. Flinchbaugh had at least one undergraduate teaching assistant per year, and in the recent decades, it averaged to two a year. Thirty-six individuals were identified by archived course syllabi. Three individuals were contacted through the teaching assistant list, and all three agreed to participate. Once we began interviewing, snowball sampling was used to identify additional, information-rich participants (Creswell and Poth 2018) who took the class throughout Dr. Flinchbaugh's forty-nine years of teaching. Eleven individuals were identified through suggestions from other interviewers. Recruitment emails were sent to potential participants using contact information from the lead researcher's personal network as well as the other interviewees. Seven individuals responded and agreed to participate in the study. We were limited to contacting those participants for whom we could secure a phone number or email address.

Data was collected using retrospective, semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility in question order and follow-up questions based on each interviewee (Flick 2018). Retrospective, semi-structured interviews provide consistency by asking everyone the same questions while allowing them to share their own experiences, memories, and thoughts through open-ended questions. Our procedure for preparing and conducting interviews follows the recommendations of Creswell and Poth (2018) and Tracy (2020). After reviewing the literature on teaching effectiveness, we developed an interview guide containing open-ended questions written to encourage participants to describe their experience as a student and perspective on Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching effectiveness (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Hu 2020). The interview guide was used to ensure consistency in questions asked as well as structure to the interview for data collection. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B. Informed by previous research (Alhija 2017; Hu 2020; Bledsoe et al. 2021; Chew and Cerbin 2021), the questions asked interviewees to describe themselves as students, their experiences in AGECE 410, how they perceived Dr.

Flinchbaugh's teaching effectiveness, and the role their experience in AGE 410 had in shaping their academic and professional careers. Vagle (2014) and Tracy (2020) recommend experience questions, such as these, for studies with a phenomenological approach because they elicit stories from participants as they reflect on specific situations.

To enhance credibility, the guide was reviewed by an associate professor of agricultural education with expertise in teaching methods and effectiveness as well as an associate professor librarian with expertise in qualitative methodologies and education. The feedback from these reviews was incorporated to finalize the interview guide, which consisted of four demographic, close-ended questions, and seven focus questions with accompanying follow-up questions (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015). The demographic questions allowed participants to provide context of their perspective on their educational and career aspirations when taking Dr. Flinchbaugh's course. An additional focus question and follow-up questions were asked of participants who also indicated they were also former teaching assistants for Dr. Flinchbaugh. This type of questioning allows questions to be asked in a conversational manner that solicits greater detail when needed (Flick 2018). The interview consisted of open-ended questions to gather participant perceptions of the teaching effectiveness of Dr. Flinchbaugh in terms of how they experienced his teaching methods and their impact on their academic and professional success.

One of the authors interviewed all participants to provide consistency in data collection. Before each interview, participants provided their consent to participate. The participants were provided with a consent form approved by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board. Interviews were conducted either via Zoom or in person. Participants returned signed consent forms before their respective interviews. The interviews were conducted between January 2022 and July 2022, each lasting for about thirty minutes. At the beginning of each meeting, participants were verbally told the purpose of the study and asked if their interview could be recorded. The interviews were audio recorded, and handwritten notes were taken down. Participants are identified by pseudonyms throughout this paper to protect the identity of the panel. Rev, a professional transcription service, was used to transcribe the interview data verbatim.

Phenomenological data analysis requires researchers to "generate themes from the analysis of significant statements" (Creswell and Poth 2018). Significant statements are those that establish how the participant experienced the AGE 410 course related to the research questions (Creswell and Poth 2018). Similar to the phenomenological approach followed by Chyun Hu (2020), inspired by Van Manen (2016), a thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted to identify themes (Sechelski and Onwuegbuzie 2019). This process involves closely reading the text several times to identify significant statements related to the research questions, allowing meaning and larger themes to emerge from participants' own language.

Credibility and dependability were enhanced by referential adequacy, using the exact words of the participants to determine the themes. All interpretations of the text always referred to the material (Ary et al. 2010). In addition, a draft of this paper was given to two interview participants to review the accuracy of the analysis prior to submission for publication (Fraenkel et al. 2023). The verbatim transcripts were compared to the audio recordings and notes from each interview to confirm consistency.

Methods of reflexivity were used throughout data collection and analysis to manage the bias, values, and experiences we bring to this study (Creswell and Poth 2018). Notes were written throughout the data collection and analysis processes. These records serve as a means of triangulation, to reflect on the interview, and identify how we may affect the interactions with participants and the data. As members of the higher education community, we recognized our position as faculty members in agricultural communications and agricultural economics frames our perspectives. In addition, we are both former students of Dr. Flinchbaugh's AGE 410 class.

A total of ten interviews were conducted. Data collection was concluded after the tenth interview because data saturation had been reached, that is responses were reinforcing, rather than diverging, themes emerging in the data (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson 2006; Tracy 2020). The respondents represented a cross-section of former students able to answer our questions because of the diversity in when their student experience happened, the type of student they described themselves as, and their current occupation. At least one student from every decade of Dr. Flinchbaugh's career was interviewed. Interview participants included six males and four females. Participants were asked to describe themselves as Kansas State students. Four interviewees described themselves primarily as "a very involved student" who did not necessarily put academics first. Three interviewees described themselves as "pretty serious about my studies." Two others described themselves as a "fairly typical college of ag student" who was "not even close to a straight A student." The professions of the interview participants included academia, nonprofit organization, production agriculture, government, and commodity organizations.

4 Results

RQ1: What do former students perceive to be the methods of effective teaching used by Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh in AGE 410?

Participating interviewees perceived Dr. Flinchbaugh's methods of effective teaching to be genuine interest in students and subject, engaging storytelling, and challenging students intellectually. These factors were commonly mentioned by participants as the adaptive teaching methods that enhanced their motivation, perseverance, and learning in the course (Chew and Cerbin 2021).

4.1 Genuine Interest in Student and Subject

Nearly all of the former students interviewed described Dr. Flinchbaugh's authentic care for each student's success in the classroom and their careers, held in tandem with his love for teaching the subject of agricultural policy. For instance, Betty shared how Dr. Flinchbaugh consistently exuded delight in teaching students, an attribute she appreciated even more after working professionally in education.

"Just fundamentally, it was just his passion and his obvious joy that he got from teaching and from the topic. It was, again, now that I've approached teaching from the other side, I know that sometimes it can take a little effort to be enthused and excited every day in the classroom. He seemed to just always naturally be happy to be standing up there in front of us."

Dr. Flinchbaugh's curiosity and "all-in" attitude for students was acknowledged by former students as evidence of care that led to effective teaching. How he conveyed that care evolved and grew over his nearly half-century teaching career, but was always present, as described by Carolyn when she stated:

"At some point he moved from the gruff guy at the front of the room who chose to use intimidation with students, to someone who was really willing to stand at the front of the room and make sure everybody knew how much he cared about them. [...] By the time he was done teaching, I think even the gruffest students who sit in the back row, knew he cared about them, and I don't think he would've stayed as effective if that piece hadn't been the case."

Dr. Flinchbaugh not only desired to see students succeed in the classroom, but also in their careers. He taught agricultural policy as a mechanism to prepare the next generation of effective leaders across industry segments, as Daniel described.

"He was very passionate about making sure that there was a next generation that knew the knowledge that he had. You could tell that the passion of him as a teacher came from a sense of needing to pass along what he learned to the next generation."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Flinchbaugh taught virtually. Despite distance and technology challenges, his care for the student, investment in their success, and passion for agricultural policy persisted. Elizabeth described her experience as a student in AGE 410 during one of the virtually delivered semesters:

"I felt like I was always so valued as a student, more so in his class than any other, because he was taking that extra time to make sure that his teaching was effective, even though it was through a medium that he wasn't comfortable with."

By conveying these interests genuinely to the students, initial connections were formed between Dr. Flinchbaugh and the student, creating a bridge that fostered the students' desire for learning. His *genuine interest in the student and subject* was demonstrated by curiosity, enthusiasm, and devotion to teaching and learning.

4.2 Engaging Storytelling

Dr. Flinchbaugh's affinity for and mastery of storytelling was a significant theme throughout the data. Former students described his stories as engaging because they were based on real events and personal experiences. The stories were a part of Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching methods, woven throughout lectures to make abstract concepts concrete and timely. When asked about what AGE 410 class sessions and assessments were like, Francis described:

"I think that he probably tailored it to the classes and what was happening in the news. The bulk of the structure was that there were certain chapters we were going to cover every week in the book, in the textbook, and there was going to be a quiz that covered that material every other Friday-ish. But that was probably the vast majority of the structure. I feel like the rest of it was relatively free-flowing, filling in with stories and talking about things that were happening."

The stories improved information recall for George, *"He made his point through stories, and you can remember the stories. He was able to tie it in with things that you could remember, and if you could remember the story, you could remember the point."*

The stories Dr. Flinchbaugh told in the classroom engaged students by taking global and national agricultural policy issues relevant at the local level. This approach invited students to relate to the story and think of someone they knew who might be affected by the issue. Betty verbalized this point, echoed by several former students, when she stated:

"When he would talk about policymaking at the national level, he would give examples to bring it back to small-town Kansas and think about people that play different roles, because most of the students in the class were from small-town Kansas. He'd say 'Think about the role your local banker plays or your local school board president or...' He'd sort of use small-town Kansas as a microcosm for larger policymaking decision arenas."

Dr. Flinchbaugh gleaned his stories from real experiences he had working in agricultural policy development and Extension at the national, state, and local levels. For most of the interviewed former students, being a practitioner of the topic is what made Dr. Flinchbaugh an effective teacher. Carolyn describes that shared sentiment, stating the following:

"Hands down, I think that was the most important piece for me as an effective teacher, that he knew his information, but he knew it outside of the classroom. He didn't talk about things he never had his hands in. He was really active in it."

4.3 Challenging Intellectually

Dr. Flinchbaugh challenged students intellectually to encourage them to learn. By creating an environment of two-way discussion, he fostered students' motivation and critical thinking. Several interviewees mentioned how intent Dr. Flinchbaugh was on students' learning, including Henry, who said, *"Even though the class was very dynamic, a lot of discussion and everything, he required that you learn something, and he was very, very conscious of the fact that he wanted you to learn."*

Dynamic discussion is unpredictable and dependent on the participating members. This created a classroom in which, *"there was a little edge of the unexpected all the time. There was always something new you're going to be challenged on intellectually or just general life stuff, too,"* said James. Dr. Flinchbaugh would not let students loaf in class. Rather, he knew how to motivate students to participate. James went on to say, *"He'd call you out when you needed to be called out, and he'd encourage you when you needed to be encouraged."*

Dr. Flinchbaugh enjoyed the give and take of a discussion, so he was willing to be challenged by students as a method of effective teaching. By encouraging students to explain and argue their point of view on a topic, they had to think critically to build their case. Elizabeth explained how she experienced Dr. Flinchbaugh's approach to challenging students intellectually:

"A willingness to be challenged. He was always willing to discuss. He's been teaching this class for however long. His answers on tests are his answers on tests, but he was always willing to discuss if you had a reason for thinking that another answer was appropriate, which I think really encouraged students' critical thinking."

RQ2: How do former students perceive the impact of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's teaching methods on their success as a student and a professional?

Former students were asked about the impact Dr. Flinchbaugh's methods of effective teaching had on them as students and as professionals. Many participants echoed Betty's sentiment, *"He had a very fundamental and significant role in my professional trajectory."* Dr. Flinchbaugh also encouraged students to double-down on their passions, as Carolyn describes, *"When I think about the impact he had on me as a student, he helped me drill into an interest."*

Three themes emerged as the mechanisms for Dr. Flinchbaugh's impact on former students' academic and professional success: exposure to new possibilities, facilitated connections, and longevity of lessons. Participants commonly mentioned these factors as influential to their paths as a student and professional beyond AGEC 410 (Chew and Cerbin 2021).

4.4 Exposure to New Possibilities

The choice to enroll in Dr. Flinchbaugh's AGEC 410 class had lasting effects on interviewed former students. Many participants attributed a shift in their academic trajectories, and later their careers. The shift was influenced by Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching methods, which exposed students to new experiences and opportunities in a way that was accessible and sparked interest in students. For instance, Francis described how Dr. Flinchbaugh made working in agricultural policy attainable:

"To a certain extent, when you grow up in rural Kansas, you don't get a lot of those kinds of experiences. [...] So, I think to a certain extent, he put the world of policy work and ag policy work ... He created this idea that it was within the reach of work that we could do."

Bringing agricultural policymaking within reach in AGECE 410 influenced students' decision-making outside of the classroom, as Kit described, *"I would not have been probably very likely to take that internship or even apply for it before having taken Ag Policy."*

Many participants recounted how Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching initiated a decision to switch their major or pivot their disciplinary focus between their bachelor's and master's degrees. Daniel illustrated this shift when he stated, *"After taking his class and learning that I could serve in public service and also work in agriculture, I completely changed what my courses were, started making those look more like something that I could use in public service."*

Dr. Flinchbaugh's influence on students' success in school and their career builds on the foundation of his genuine care for the student. Betty reflected, *"I think sometimes he would see potential in undergraduate students that maybe they hadn't yet seen in themselves, or he would help encourage people to think about opportunities and options that they hadn't yet identified in themselves."*

4.5 Facilitated Connections

Former students fondly remembered each semester in AGECE 410 beginning with every student completing a notecard of personal information, followed by Dr. Flinchbaugh meeting each student and spending a few seconds visiting with them. This exchange built on Dr. Flinchbaugh's network of relationships he called on to facilitate connections for students. Brian described how Dr. Flinchbaugh's work and his appreciation for relationships created a vast network. *"Flinchbaugh was just so connected with everybody, and knew so much about people's families, and where you came from and what you were doing,"* Larry stated.

Dr. Flinchbaugh facilitated connections internal and external to his classroom. He encouraged students to get to know each other and connect by studying for exams together. Elizabeth stated Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching methods created "camaraderie" among students that spanned academic, professional, and political boundaries to establish a "common respect" between former students of Dr. Flinchbaugh. That camaraderie opened doors for former students, including Carolyn, who described how being a student of Dr. Flinchbaugh facilitated connections:

"All because I got myself in rooms even when I was an intern, because I was Dr. Flinchbaugh's student. So, I got to go to meetings when it wasn't even my Senator on the Ag Committee. I was in Senate Ag Committee staff meetings, working on components of the Farm Bill because they trusted me because I was a Flinchbaugh student."

Dr. Flinchbaugh's teaching methods were effective in building excitement among students about the material, making them eager to discuss the content and the class with others who had shared the experience, creating "instant connection," said Elizabeth.

4.6 Longevity of Lessons

The lessons Dr. Flinchbaugh delivered through AGECE 410 had lasting impacts on the interviewed former students. Reported effects included an impact on how former students learn, problem solve, and navigate relationships in their current professional careers. For example, James stated:

"I think as a professional, some of the phrases and some of the things, the ideas that he seated about politics and kingmakers and how the sausage gets ground and how to be a good human"

and how to ride to the middle of the problem, I think are things that I always remember as I'm navigating the D.C. stuff right now."

The effective teaching method of Dr. Flinchbaugh's pedagogy encouraged interviewed former students to become continuous learners. In AGE 410, it was acceptable not to know every answer, but finding it was expected. Kit described this expectation when they stated, "If you don't know, go find out and report back and learn about it."

Dr. Flinchbaugh's approach to agricultural policymaking informed how former students seek to carry themselves as professionals. As Elizabeth described:

"I look forward to what my career looks like; I hope that I can emulate a lot of the things that he did of focusing on issues around politics, of being able to find commonality and create bridges between the two aisles, and to have, I keep saying audacity, but I really think of that word, because of him."

While agricultural policy content stayed with students, so did the lessons within the lessons—those nuggets of wisdom about how to approach life's grander challenges. The longevity of Dr. Flinchbaugh's lessons means former students carry them into their roles as students and professionals well beyond the boundaries of a classroom and a semester.

5 Recommendations

RQ1: What do former students perceive to be the methods of effective teaching used by Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh in AGE 410?

Participants shared Dr. Flinchbaugh's genuine care for students as well as the agriculture industry were exuded through his lectures and interactions with others. Teaching principles centered around students, such as authenticity and caring, are important for creating positive learning environments (Saucier et al. 2022) and creating a high-quality relationship between teacher and students (Hagenauer and Volet 2014). Dr. Flinchbaugh started each semester of his course off the same way. He would have each of his students write their name, hometown information, and other relevant information down on a notecard. For the first week of lecture, he would go one by one and visit with each student and have a short conversation. Later in his career, he discovered his students spanned multiple generations. Additionally, teaching assistant participants noted his approaches to exam and quiz writing. After writing his questions, he would have his teaching assistants review them to ensure clarity and understanding of each student in his classroom. If a significant number of students missed a question, he would reflect on what he did wrong in his teaching or question writing as opposed to what the student did not understand. From these instances, he would revise the question and incorporate it into an upcoming exam to reassess student learning.

Participants from this study said his stories were memorable and allowed students to make connections with course content to their everyday lives. Storytelling has been noted as an effective teaching tool to engage with students, help students remember course concepts, and create a relationship between students and teachers (Green 2004; Sharda 2007). Participants mentioned Dr. Flinchbaugh challenged them to think critically through classroom discussions about topics within agricultural policy and American politics. Discussions have been noted as an important pedagogy as it helps students to prepare for public discourse and citizenship post college (Howard 2002).

RQ2: How do former students perceive the impact of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's teaching methods on their success as a student and a professional?

The themes associated with this research question were that Dr. Flinchbaugh exposed his students to new opportunities, integrated students into a network of contacts, and provided a framework of thinking about policy issues. Participants said he provided them with the chance to think about the world differently, including careers, academics, and ideas. Faculty interactions have positive influences on motivation and career development (Komarraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya 2010). Participants shared Dr. Flinchbaugh connected his students to contacts within industry and government as well as created a classroom environment that encouraged peer study groups. It was observed that students noticed his approachability, and his proximity changed in the most recent decades. Dr. Flinchbaugh's retirement from Extension in 2004 may have provided more time to interact and engage with students outside of the classroom. Knowing his students on a more personal level allowed him to learn more about their career aspirations and integrate them into his extensive network of contacts. Student networking has been shown to have a positive influence on grade performance (Hwang, Kessler, and Francesco 2004) and persistence (Zwolak, Zwolak, and Brewe 2018). In addition, faculty can provide external validity to degree outcomes by connecting students with alumni and industry connections, and increasing students' professional networks (Vieregger and Bryant 2020; English et al. 2021). Participants noted Dr. Flinchbaugh's ability to build lifelong learning skills as they approach situations along their career path. Teaching methods used by instructors in courses develop various competencies not only desired by employers but general and soft skills (Lavi, Tal, and Dori 2021).

A limitation of this study may be students were primed by questions to provide responses related to effective teaching practices and positive memories of their time in Dr. Flinchbaugh's course. Interviewees may have been willing to speak with us because of their positive experiences in Dr. Flinchbaugh's class. Those with negative experiences may not have taken the opportunity to be interviewed because of a desire to respect the late professor. In addition, Dr. Flinchbaugh had almost 5,000 students take his course throughout his career. This study focused on a much smaller sample of students to provide richer content than traditional survey methods. Although we interviewed a variety of types of students from across the timeline of Dr. Flinchbaugh's career, we do not believe the interviewees represent all types of former students. Generalizability is not a characteristic of qualitative research, but transferability to other classroom environments is enhanced by the descriptions of our interviewees' characteristics and experiences (Tracy 2020).

6 Conclusions

Teachers can have a significant impact on their students. This study sheds light on teaching practices and instructional qualities of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh, a renowned agricultural policy professor. The findings of this research revealed the importance of a student-centered approach that emphasizes active engagement, critical thinking, and real-world application. Furthermore, the study revealed that Dr. Flinchbaugh's instructional methods promoted effective student-teacher interactions, creating a supportive and collaborative environment. The provision of timely and constructive feedback, as well as the cultivation of open dialogue, allowed for individualized guidance and mentorship, which positively influenced students' intellectual growth and professional development. This study serves as a tribute to the exemplary teaching career of Dr. Flinchbaugh and underscores the profound impact that passionate and student-centered instruction can have on student learning outcomes. It is hoped that this research will inspire further investigations into effective teaching practices and contribute to the ongoing efforts to enhance the quality of education in agricultural economics and other disciplines.

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Appendix A: Agricultural Policy Outline

- A. The Policy Setting
 - 1. Public Decision-Making – Who and How
 - 2. Methods of Analysis
 - 3. Economic Principles
 - 4. Macroeconomics
 - 5. Effect of Pandemic
- B. The Politics of Agriculture
 - 1. Governmental Institutions
 - 2. Farm Organizations
 - 3. Other Special Interest Groups
 - 4. Policy Decision Process
- C. The Foreign Dimension
 - 1. Economic Principles
 - 2. WTO
 - 3. Trade Policy/Trade Wars
 - 4. Development Policy
- D. Macroeconomic Policy – Monetary and Fiscal
- E. Domestic Farm Policy
 - 1. The Historical Farm Problem
 - 2. Free Market to Mandatory Controls
 - 3. Farm Bills – Past, Present, and Future
 - 4. Crop Insurance
 - 5. Emergency Payments
 - 6. Food and Nutrition Programs
- F. The Structure of Agriculture
 - 1. Alternative Structures
 - 2. Concentration, Integration, Contracting
 - 3. Future of the Family Farm/Rural Communities
 - 4. Agri-Business
- G. Biofuels Policy
 - 1. National Security
 - 2. All Sources
 - 3. Food vs. Fuel

- H. Resource Policy
 - 1. Living with Limited Resources
 - 2. Land and Water
 - 3. Environmental Issues
 - 4. Endangered Species
 - 5. Animal Welfare/Rights
 - 6. Climate Change
 - 7. Deregulation
 - 8. Immigration
- I. Food Policy
 - 1. Food Safety and Security
 - 2. Food Assistance and Nutrition
 - 3. GMO, Organic, and Local Foods
- J. Role of Government in 21st Century Agriculture

Appendix B: Interview Guide

Thank you for meeting with me today. As we discussed, we are interviewing a few of Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh's former teaching assistants and students. We hope to learn your perspective on what made Dr. Flinchbaugh an effective teacher in AGECE 410, Ag Policy, and how your experience in the class influenced your academic and professional trajectory.

I am going to record our discussion. Is that okay?

Your name will not be associated with any information reported from this research, or future research. We will assign you a pseudonym, so all of your responses will remain confidential. If there is a question you prefer not to answer, please just say so.

We'll start out with a few demographic questions, then get into your experience with Dr. Flinchbaugh in AGECE 410.

What is your current occupation?

What was your undergraduate major at Kansas State?

What year did you graduate with your undergraduate degree at Kansas State?

Do you have any higher degrees? If so, from what are they?

How would you describe yourself as a KSU student?

What was it like being a student in Dr. Flinchbaugh's AGECE 410, Ag Policy class?

What were class sessions like?

How were you assessed – assignments, exams?

From your perspective as a student in Dr. Flinchbaugh's class, what made him an effective teacher?

What specific memories of the class stand out to you now? Please describe them.

What behaviors did Dr. Flinchbaugh exhibit that exemplified effective teaching?

Can you recall any specific actions where he demonstrated these behaviors?

If a TA – **Would you please describe your experience as a TA for AGECE 410?**

How did it differ from your experience as a student in the class?

While a TA, what additional perspective did you gain on his approach to teaching?

How do you describe the impact Dr. Flinchbaugh had on you as a student?

How do you describe the impact Dr. Flinchbaugh had on you as a professional?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Who else should we talk to as a part of this research?

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