

# How To Influence Your Professors for Christ

Thoughts by Dr. John Walkup, Dr. Steve Sternberb, Kent Dalberg and Mike Madaris  
Edited by Gary Hellman

## 1. PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR PROFESSORS

"Faculty are people too, and need love, affirmation and encouragement just like the rest of us." - Dr. John Walkup, professor, Texas Tech

Remember professors are human beings too, with the typical needs, concerns and insecurities that afflict the rest of us. As you well know, just because a person has Ph.D. after their name does not mean that they have it all together. Sometimes it is easy to equate professors with near-omniscient, emotion-less, inhuman creatures with no needs.

## 2. BE GOOD STUDENTS

Go to class, sit up front, do your homework and engage yourself in class discussion and work hard. This will gain the most notice from your professor.

"Students need to minister from a platform of excellence. I define being a good student as appearing interested and working hard." - Dr. Mike Madaris, former professor, CLM Director, Mississippi and Alabama

## 3. PRAY FOR YOUR PROFESSORS

Pray for your professors by name and regularly. Ask the professors for more personal information during an office hour visit because you pray regularly for all of your professors and you like to be specific. For example, if married ask for wife's name and occupation, children's names (if has any) and ages, parent's health, etc. Then, pray for them and if requests are specific, check on the progress (i.e. ask about sick/aging parents, wife's job, children's schooling, etc.) of your request.

## 4. RELATIONSHIP WITH PROFESSORS

"Students can go a long way by simply loving their faculty (in an agape sense, not an eros sense!)." - Dr. John Walkup

Try to develop a more personal relationship with your professors outside of class: office hours, invite to lunch with other students and talk about the course subject matter and personal life, invite to an event in which you are playing a part (like giving testimony at CCC or IV meeting, etc.) to get feedback, etc. Professors also need encouraging words now and then (outside of class to avoid appearing like a suck-up artist). I would counsel students to avoid too much male-female initiating with their professors.

Stay interested after the semester is over; in fact, it's probably easier to connect with a professor when a student is not in his/her class. This avoids any possible sense of manipulation, grade bargaining, or other impropriety.

## 5. INFLUENCING YOUR PROFESSORS (bottom line: faith!!)

Outside of class -- I would encourage students to initiate towards their professors, ask them to join them for lunch sometime, etc. Then they can get to know them a bit, outside the professional boundaries of their offices and classrooms. In the course of conversation, the student can simply



ask them something like "What is your spiritual background?" or "Do you think much about religious questions?" Then you just sit back and see what they say (or don't say), and proceed however seems appropriate. Just asking one such question -- without even saying anything about your own spiritual pilgrimage -- may open up that area of a professor's life with the student.

"I would emphasize listening more than talking, particularly since the student is in a traditionally inferior position relative to the professor (in age, education, and life experience). Listening first can lead to the professor asking the student for his or her thoughts on the subject of spiritual things. Then the student is in a much stronger position to be heard well and his or her thoughts taken seriously." Kent Dalberg, CLM Director, Dartmouth College

Ask professors to read a short apologetic article in their discipline or professor's professional interest (e.g., giving a biology professor Michael Behe's book, *The Black Box*). See enclosed list of books and web site of Christian Leadership Ministries at end.

Inside of class - Speak the truth in love. If the subject matter has points of contact with your Christian faith, try to think those through and research them to bounce them off of your professor or to ask pointed and gracious questions in class. (Examples: Sociology-definition of family, gender issues, fatherhood, sexuality, prison reform, multi-culturalism etc.; Philosophy (origins, morals, ethics, metaphysics, etc.); English (worldview issues, multiculturalism, deconstruction, etc.). This is easier in the humanities than in the hard sciences but also possible in Law and Business ethics, etc.

NOTE: Your study and grappling with issues brought up in class is not primarily for the course or for the professor but for you personally. The professor might not/will probably not become a Christian and you might not get a better grade but you will grow in your faith. Read books and become familiar with the discussion and learn to ask questions rather than call the professor's beliefs or course material into question.

#### **6. SPEAKING IN CLASS** (bottom line, you may get ridiculed!)

"If the Christian faith is ridiculed and put down with a less than "reasonable" approach, one way to deal with that is to NOT remain silent but say something like, "I'm a Christian and take my faith very seriously. I'm rather disappointed by the comments that were made about Christianity because I doubt that anyone would speak in a like manner about Jews, African Americans or other groups. I really expected more from this discussion." An answer like this appeals to one's sense of fairness and decency, not to mention coherence. Or, students could come up with another answer." - Steve Sternberg, CLM Director, SMU

TIPS : remember, respect and self-control . Stay with the facts, as much as possible . Stay humble . Pick your battles . Try to avoid shaming your professor/classmates

#### **7. DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL FAITH**

"Christian students need to take their faith and studies seriously. An 8th grade faith is not something one wants to "graduate from college with" in spite of the fact that that is what they more than likely brought to college." Dr. Mike Madaris



## **8. REFER CHRISTIAN PROFESSORS TO CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES**

Please contact us (at Christian Leadership Ministries, 3440 Sojourn Drive, Suite 200, Carrollton, TX 75006; Phone: 972-713-7130; Fax: 972-713-7670; Email: lu@clm.org) with names of faculty or staff that you find out are Christians. Their involvement in CLM will help them become stronger in their faith. Also refer stories where teachers ridicule Christianity and/or speak out about other religions, alternate lifestyles, etc.

## **9. SOME DON'Ts**

Don't argue with a professor in class (about the Gospel or anything else!); disagree respectfully, professionally and privately. Don't blow off his/her class and then expect him/her to respond to you; if you are a student who doesn't take a professor's life work seriously, why should the professor take the student seriously? Don't be prideful (true in sharing Christ with anyone of course, but also true with faculty). Don't forget that it's the Spirit's job to draw people to Christ; we are simply a dispenser of "salt tablets." Don't plan on having an hour-long appointment with a professor -- faculty time is extremely limited and students should honor that. Don't drop by unless it's during office hours without an appointment.

## **10. A READING LIST**

Darwin on Trial, and Reason in the Balance, by Phillip Johnson  
The Creator and the Cosmos, and The Fingerprint of God, by Hugh Ross  
Can Man Live without God?, by Ravi Zacharias  
Mere Christianity, by C.S. Lewis  
The Soul of the American University, by George Marsden  
What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?, by James Kennedy  
A Ready Defense, by Josh McDowell  
The Black Box, by Michael Behe

## **11. VISIT LEADERSHIP U.**

The WWW homepage of Christian Leadership Ministries, with over 1 million hits a month. Over 3000 articles are available that can assist you in communicating Christianity in the context of current issues.

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