



# My Favorite Professor

It is no overstatement that the course of a life can be changed by a single professor whose lectures come alive or who takes a special interest in his or her students. One of the most enduring legacies of Thiel College is the admiration and respect that its professors receive from students across the decades. Here, a small group of those grateful students shares stories of favorite and most influential Thiel professors.



## Paul Vang: “Merci, mon Professor!”

“One of my favorite professors was Paul Vang in the Foreign Language Department. He taught French with a flair that his students immensely enjoyed.

What set Monsieur Vang apart was the wonderful hauteur he assumed as he drilled us in nouns, verbs and the passé compose. It was the true French attitude, he explained, with a sly sense of humor that made us laugh even as we went through the tenses again and again—“Repetez!”

My friend, Jo Ann Carr '70, and I loved M. Vang's quirky approach to language education, his gift for making normally dull drills fun. We both longed to go to Paris, but doubted we could ever live up to M. Vang's high standard for the spoken word in the City of Lights. Years later when I did go to Paris, I thought about my French teacher and how right he was about the language, the people and mon Dieu, the attitude that make the French unique.

Merci, mon professor!”

—Patricia McElligott '71

**Professor David Miller:** “A down-to-earth nice guy who was willing to help you.”

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“My favorite professor was David Miller because he was a professor who was concerned about the students learning the important aspects from his business classes.

In his lectures, he highlighted the main points and those were what the students were tested on, not hidden material in footnotes. He made class interesting by giving true life examples and by being a down-to-earth nice guy who was willing to help you.”

—Gary Kunkle '69

**Dr. Robert Olson:** “Because of people like Dr. Olson, I am still involved with Thiel College today.”

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“My favorite Thiel professor is Dr. Robert Olson, professor of history. Because of his love of history, he taught his courses in a way that made it more interesting to me.

Outside of class, he was easy to approach and talk to. He would help you with any class work. Also, you could sense that he was concerned about your personal well-being. His pragmatism made life more enjoyable on campus.

Because of people like Dr. Olson, I am still involved with Thiel College today.

—Leo Phillips '84

**Dr. Roy Johnson:** “His honesty, modesty and humility were key charismas of his personality.”

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“Without a doubt my favorite professor would be Dr. Roy Johnson, head of the History Department for many decades. Dr. Johnson was a very brilliant man, but not the most exciting of lecturers. His influence was in his style and philosophy of life. He was deeply religious and served as a lay preacher long before it was an accepted practice in Lutheranism. He excelled in his love of the history of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. His honesty, modesty and humility were key

charismas of his personality.

Following the death of his wife, he demonstrated a helpful process of grieving and coping by his continued hopeful and dedicated living to his family, students and colleagues.

His greatest gift to me was in the area of political science. After attending several conferences and rallies with him, I switched from being a Republican to a Democrat. For Dr. Johnson's and Thiel's influence on my life, I am grateful and appreciative.”

—The Rev. Dr. Clyde A. McGee '61

**Professor Vincent Spencer Goodreds:** “...I didn't want to disappoint him.”

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“Professor Goodreds was a tremendous influence on my career as he talked to me on many occasions about my future in teaching. He was my speech instructor and also athletic director at that time. He said that if I really was interested in becoming a teacher and coach, I should take as many English courses as I could. He said I would have more opportunities as an English teacher and coach than in any other teaching position.

My first job was teaching English and coaching—37 years of English classes in junior high, high school and community college followed that. I also coached track, football, golf and boys' and girls' basketball at the same time. I'm sure he was looking down to see how I was doing, so I didn't want to disappoint him.

—Bob (Weintz) Weinzell '59

**Dr. James Koshan:** “I couldn't imagine being where I am today academically without the lessons I learned from his classes.”

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“When thinking of my favorite Thiel professor, it was a little difficult to pinpoint just one, but it comes down to the one that influenced me the most overall. That would be Dr. James Koshan of the History Department. Not only did his classes prepare me for graduate school and for

the future, he also provided amazing advice and has continued to be an adviser and colleague even after I graduated.

His classes taught us how to not just read history, but to discuss it with our peers and to effectively research and write within the historical field. As well, he encouraged his students, including myself, to push ourselves and to participate in conferences and to succeed. His guidance and aid was, and is, always available.

When looking back at my four years at Thiel, I couldn't imagine the History Department without Dr. Koshan and I couldn't imagine being where I am today academically without the lessons I learned from his classes and his own life story.

—Amanda Rooney '07

**Dr. Robert M. Davies:** “He excelled in asking questions that elicited genuine engagement”

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“Robert M. Davies, Ph.D., professor and chair of the English Department, was my most influential professor at Thiel. A demanding professor, he excelled in asking questions that elicited genuine engagement in the writing or reading task he assigned. I learned quickly that he had standards. I thought I had slaved over a paper I submitted to him and he returned it with the penciled observation, “Not a bad first effort—needs revision. See me.” I nearly wept at that assessment.

Despite his high standards and insistence on written assignments and exams, he was so engaging a lecturer that his classes always enrolled to the maximum. Trying to control the burgeoning enrollment in his courses, he began teaching his courses on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings. When that stratagem failed to lower enrollment, he began each course by announcing, “I give essay exams. Surely you don't want to endure that.” That, too, failed.

I cannot think of a finer tribute to Dr. Davies than to note that, upon submitting my doctoral dissertation for faculty review, all three readers returned it devoid of any required revisions. Thank you, Dr. Davies.”

—Philip W. Namy, A.B., '62