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Retrospective View of PER-Informed Teaching in Introductory Physics (I)

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After 22 years of teaching first-year university introductory physics, this past year marks the foreseeable end to this aspect of my academic career with my move to become a Graduate Studies Dean and AVP Research. This milestone provides opportunity to reflect upon this journey, and hope to provide some useful insight to others of you who remain intimately embroiled in the challenge of being a “successful” (however we define that!) instructor of introductory physics courses. I will review my path from zero-experience rookie learning from superb mentors at Florida State University who introduced me to the existence of Physics Education Research, into my own attempts to implement aspects of PER-inspired techniques into my own courses for the latter 17 years at Saint Mary’s. While my passion in this area was recognized with various levels of teaching/educational-leadership awards, reflection upon “what really changed” over those years is instructive. I will also discuss the various levels of success in having lasting impact within my (former) department following my departure, and the real pragmatic challenges involved for any department managing the response to a high-profile teaching zealot in their midst.

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