Nivedita (Niva) Gupta believes that when things go right you learn a lot, but when things go wrong you learn even more.

That’s why she loves teaching, and why one of her favorite classes to teach is a chemical engineering unit operations lab. The lab calls for students to do experiments based only on the theory they’ve learned in class, often without any other lab experience—and that leaves lots of room for failure.

“I learn so much even as I’m teaching,” Gupta says. “Students have interesting ways of looking at things and I often wonder, ‘why didn’t I think of that?’ Even though I usually teach the same classes every year, the way one teaches is never the same. It’s exciting to see students piece the puzzle together—that Aha! moment. I personally believe they can be successful, each and every one of them.”

Gupta knew by her second year as an undergraduate engineering student that she wanted to teach. And when she first visited UNH nine years ago, she knew this was the place to do it.

“The chemical engineering department has a strong tradition of valuing teaching and that was important to me,” she says. “I’ve found there is no one right way to teach, but that your personal philosophy plays an important role. I really do emphasize that all students be treated as equals. It’s important to be compassionate, but the playing field must be level for everyone and I try to be as objective as possible.”

Gupta says that while she’s mostly found her own way, she appreciates her mentors. “I look forward to talking with them at professional meetings and sharing research as colleagues,” she says. “Niva is able to cultivate a positive, learner-centered classroom that focuses on active learning,” says P.T. Vasudevan, professor and chair of chemical engineering. “She has very high expectations and she is tough, but at the same time she is able to relate to students’ needs, has good interpersonal skills, and displays a professional sense of commitment to her responsibilities.”

—Erika Mantz

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