WCC instructor Clayton Akatsuka's students aren't merely taught math; they're groomed in a special way.

In 1976, Akatsuka started his teaching career along with his hobby of dog show competition, which has enabled him to develop a unique philosophy.

"The basic ideas behind training show dogs and teaching are the same," Akatsuka said. "Consistency, repetition and practice apply to both types of training."

Both his career and hobby have brought in some prize results: WCC's 1993 Excellence in Teaching award and 10 years of having the best cocker spaniel in Hawai'i.

The student-faculty committee that recommended Akatsuka for the WCC award said he has the ability to make a sometimes difficult subject enjoyable and understandable.

"I loved his class," said WCC student Joanne Asuncion. "He always made it exciting, especially the word problems. He was always available. Even when he was busy, he made time for me as well as other students."

Akatsuka's professional teaching career started out after he earned his bachelor's degree from UH-Manoa. In 1976, while working on his master's degree at Manoa, he started teaching at Kailua High School. From there, he taught at Mid-Pacific Institute until his move to WCC in 1990.

During his time at Mid-Pac, he refined his skill in the art of training both students and his prized pets. A focused approach to teaching is something Akatsuka applies in other areas of his life.

"I feel a person must have goals — to know what you want to do in life. My goals are the same for teaching and in the training of my show dogs. To keep abreast of trends and technology in these fields allows me to keep improving."

Akatsuka also is an advisor to WCC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa where his encouragement helps sustain students striving for academic excellence.

Akatsuka gauges his success as an instructor when students learn and enjoy math — "if they are inspired to go on and do more of it," he stated.

He believes that math is important to everyday life skills because it helps develop other skills such as problem solving, discipline and logic.

The sum of Akatsuka's two favorite subjects plus his dedication to teaching equals excellence.

"I can't picture myself doing anything else. I just want to keep doing what I'm doing — only better," he maintained.