

Teaching is like vegetation ecology. Much like how plant communities assemble to function at a level greater than the sum of their parts, in my experience students can assemble from diverse backgrounds to create a learning environment that is intellectually stimulating, rewarding, and beneficial for themselves and for others. It is my philosophy that this learning environment should be leveraged to achieve two goals. First, to develop and deepen student's understanding and passion for the natural world and processes therein; and second, to prepare students with the tools necessary for gainful employment in their respective job fields after the completion of their degree.

The best way for students to develop an understanding and a passion for the world around them is to teach with unrelenting passion. While this is easier for courses such as vegetation or forest ecology, it is just as (if not more) important for courses such as applied biological statistics, or intro to programming in the biological sciences. The evaluations from students and the recognition I have received from departments for my teaching as both an instructor of record and teaching assistant have instilled the importance of teaching with passion for me. Importantly, every institution and every class is different. Student populations and their needs change based on geography, generation, demographics, current world events, and more. It is the instructor's duty to seek feedback throughout the course, not only at the end of the semester, to be more aligned with the specific needs of each class. Students that have a professional relationship of mutual respect with their instructors are more likely to feel as though they belong in college and be able to navigate challenges and difficulties.

In addition to teaching with passion and seeking active feedback from students, well-crafted assessments are necessary to reinforce the content discussed in class during lecture. Involving students in labs that mimic their future careers is beneficial for developing practical skills for employment. These may include oral presentations, oral assessments, or written reports to summarize and communicate their expertise on a topic. All assessments should be formative and designed for feedback, including examinations. As such, students are provided opportunities to receive feedback on all assessments and retake exams in order to strengthen their understanding of a topic. I allow students to retake exams and improve their scores because my primary goal is to deepen students understanding of the topic at hand, which can be achieved by reducing the stress of examinations and assessments.

My philosophies and practices represent my current views and experiences. These views and experiences have change through time and originate from listening and learning from the students I teach. I have changed my instruction to be more flexible and accommodating (e.g., providing additional extensions, excusing absences) at the University of Colorado Denver than at the University of Wyoming because the student body at CU Denver is more diverse and contains complexities that UW did not. It is my duty as an instructor to keep an open ear, mind, and office wherever I go and to help create a learning environment that is intellectually stimulating, rewarding, and beneficial for all students across diverse backgrounds.