

As a teacher, I aspire to excite students about discovering new, surprising, and profound stories about the lives of others in the world with us. When students leave my courses, I hope that they take three things with them:

1. A stronger community for curiosity-driven learning.
2. The ability to find reliable information, and the confidence to discuss it; and
3. Increased empathy for the other lives around us.

What I like about teaching is that I'm also always learning more about biology, about my students, and about learning itself; I see myself as a teacher who provides guidance for helping students discover on their own. I'll elaborate on each of my goals below:

1. Building curiosity and community. Since plants, microbes, and animals form the basis of life on the planet, I am thrilled to help students rediscover our connections to land, water, air, and each other. I think we learn better when we learn in a community with fellow nature enthusiasts, so my classes involve student-directed collaborative projects. For example, for my GMU Mycoblitz project, students upload photos of whichever fungi they find interesting to our class page. Then, based on these photos we have class discussions about fungal identification and diversity. This approach engages students with a wide variety of backgrounds in mycology, encouraging advanced students to collaborate with students who were less confident in their identification skills, building more meaningful relationships.

2. Help students understand scientific information and increase their confidence in discussing it. What is "good" information? Navigating this question is a lifelong practice that I hope students pursue in my class. In my classroom, labs, and field experiences, I facilitate an ongoing conversation with my students about ways of knowing, inclusion, and scientific peer review, and we all reflect on what information is appropriate to use when. For a science communication project, my students practice becoming better communicators by creating videos, paintings, sculptures or infographics to display take-home messages; the skills in data interpretation and display that the students gain through these activities will be useful in many aspects of their lives. I also provide frameworks for students to provide feedback to each other so that we all gain skills in critically and kindly guiding others to improve. My experience in science outside of academia allows me to serve as a liaison for my students in gaining experience and skills outside the classroom, connecting them with exciting educational volunteer and internship opportunities where they can continue to build competence and confidence.

3. Inspire students to build empathy. Biology, Ecology, and Genetics are linked to many of the vibrant conversations that take place in all parts of every university about health, resilience, sustainability, and justice. When students learn about biodiversity and human systems, it can lead to their developing more compassion for living things and for each other, which will help students grow into eloquent and effective advocates for issues and communities they care about.

My teaching philosophy is that we all have something to teach and something to learn, so I aim to make a learning environment where students feel confident in sharing, teaching, and learning.