

Student Comments from Course Evaluations

Various Courses – Gene Myers

The ethical topics discussed pushed me to question my current thoughts surrounding the environment. The outside class activities also encouraged me to learn more about local policy and issues.

This class has really helped me find my voice and validate my conscience. Essential to any graduating environmental science student.

This class really made me question, and in some cases, change my ethical view.

This class really opened my mind and perception to human behavior and why people do and do not do certain things. I loved the critical thinking component.

It was good to have experience interviewing and learning about environmental organizations around the area, as well as time in front of the class presenting/ public speaking. There was a lot of freedom in this class that allowed for creativity and ‘slow food’ learning.

Although this class isn’t as structured as some, it is put together well and makes the student responsible for getting what they want out of the course.

This class made me appreciate nature on a more personal level. I haven’t spent time in the woods by myself since I was a child. The lessons learned in this class were not always from the lectures, and they were some of the most valuable ones in my college experience thus far.

This was the first class I have taken in my college career where my instructor actually asked questions about what I thought and what I wanted. This made for an amazing experience and also an extremely frustrating one because I am not used to having to think for myself. (Note: likely this is a comment more on the student’s own development than on previous instructors or myself)

Great to have group projects and assignments that reflect environmental education. We learned the most by doing what we were being taught.

I really enjoyed the outdoor aspects of this class. We really utilized Sehome Hill, which I thought was extremely appropriate and helpful.

We really got to get out there and immerse ourselves in the field.

Some spring block self-evaluations (some pertaining to just early portions of the experience)

I had to get used to teaching such important in-depth lessons, because like I said before I haven't really done this level of teaching yet. However, I think that I did a good job of relaying the information. By the third time through, I knew the information so well I could do it without notes and had really great conversations with the kids. We repeated everything multiple times and by the city council meeting it was clear I had conveyed the information well. Sixth grade is a lot of work and it will take some getting used to, but I do enjoy working with this age group.

Anyway, despite my thoughts on how the preparation went, I think the actual teaching part went well. Although, sixth grade isn't my ideal age group I think my energy is what carried me through. The first group gave me an energy that was derived from delving into the great unknown it was a sort of nervous excitement type energy. This kind of energy helped me get into my role as the future person, which was part of our theme, and helped me understand what works well to connect with this age group. I think it also helped me nail the wren lesson because I was hyper aware of everything going on which led me into facilitating a great, relevant, inquiry based discussion.

My time spent planning, creating, and teaching lessons on Sucia Island this April has been a life changing experience. I don't know where to start. I've made incredible friends, inspired personal growth in myself and others, and come to know an island's most intimate details; I've laughed myself to tears and nearly torn my hair out while balancing school with the rest of my life; I've learned that group work can be an amazing process of flexibility, ingenuity, and joy; and I've realized that I *can* make a difference.\

Teaching my original lesson on Sucia gave me confidence and has made me feel inspired. I received positive feedback from students, my fellow Spring Blockers and from Gene. Talking in front of groups makes me nervous and I always thought that my presentation style reflected that. I thought I was an awkward presenter and that overall I was just bad at presenting. The feedback I was given was completely opposite so that makes me excited to practice more and to become a confident teacher. Especially because talking in front of groups is something that has held me back in the past. I am very happy with my growth as a teacher and am grateful for the support of my team. (from a student suffering anxiety disorder)

Before this experience I was not interested in teaching high school students because I didn't think I would enjoy the challenges that come with teaching high school students. At that age, people have their own opinions and don't respect their teachers, just because they are their teachers. This was challenging for me at the beginning of the week, but as I connected with the students, they began to respect me. By the end of the week I had connected with most of the students. What was fun and rewarding about this was that I learned about each student as an individual. I learned about what they are interested in, what their goals are, etc. I thought I would prefer elementary school students because I would be an "expert" in their eyes and they would likely respect me and love me, just for having the title, teacher. On Sucia I learned that challenges presented by students are a rewarding aspect of teaching and not something I would want to do without.

After the Sucia trip, I am feeling much better about my teaching. It's recently been something that I wanted to do, yet I was always skeptical as to how I would do and whether or not it was really something I actually wanted. After being out there and experiencing it firsthand I have decided that teaching outdoors is definitely something I want to continue doing. Being able to teach outside was definitely rewarding for me, especially in the marine environment (my favorite). Being able to be around something I really like with kids who were very excited about it made me just as excited as they were which I think is a good quality.

The two programs I was responsible for got a generally positive response. First was a night sit Monday evening. I had hoped to show off the bioluminescence to the students but the moon was too bright. A good problem. While sitting silently spread out down the beach I had the students think about this new place they were in. I wanted them to begin fostering a sense of place. Afterwards students shared observations from their time. Heard about the frogs, waves, moon on the water, how shadows changed as it got darker. For my original lesson I am so happy I had the chance to do it twice. After the first run I asked the students what they had learned and the basic knowledge of lichens was there but I felt the program was incredibly disorganized. Throughout there was much milling about and confusion. The second time after feedback from Suzy and Gene I felt so much better. Students had a chance to share the individual pieces of lichen they chose to study, learn more about me and have a chance to discover their inner lichenologist. Next time I would come prepared with more lichen knowledge. A bit more nitty gritty science like how exactly they collect air borne nutrients and reproduce as well as some technical terms of lichen morphology.

The journey of Spring Block has been the way through an internal struggle with myself and the lack of confidence I held in my voice and in my work. Peeling back the pages of my journal I found a folded little page which reads, I am learning that I am good at a lot of things—at least things Spring Block focuses on. I enjoy building fires, working in teams, sharing, cooking, cleaning, camping, opening up, being strong for a group, being inclusive, making art, utilizing a creative approach, getting close with students and loving nature. Throughout much of my life in school I have lived under a veil of worry that I am not as good as all the other students; that I just don't get it. I guess a big thing that I've learned from Spring Block is what I am good at. Spring Block has given me confidence because the work that I have done and the person that I am has been received with great enthusiasm. Spring Block has shown me my strengths in a bigger picture outside of my little social niche.

Oh Spring Block, you have taught me well. You have taught me much more than the names of plants that surround me. And although the words Cedar, Oregon Grape, Sword Fern, and Winter Wren float around in my head, and I am forever grateful for this; you have more importantly cultivated a love for knowledge and learning. You have taught me that it is okay to be new at something, even if this means you are downright bad at it. Everywhere is a starting point and is one of the most important parts of the learning journey.

When Isabel started showing me how to make cordage from stinging nettle, and when I started twisting and braiding the strands...I felt like I was *a part of* nature. It was amazing.... The moment of feeling like I had become a part of nature was powerful. Up until that point, I hadn't really realized that I felt like an outsider. Throughout the quarter I had seen other students working with various materials to create some kind of product and always thought that it looked awesome and like fun and something that I'd love to try...but I thought less about the connection they had created/were creating by doing what they were doing. I had also heard several students talk about the intense connections native peoples had with the land, a connection I thought I understood but reflecting back had no idea how to really comprehend because I had never felt that same connection. I still feel like I can't quite put in words what the experience of working with the nettle did for me, but I do know that I actually feel connected to the land around me and that that feeling started when I started working with the nettle. Now that I feel a connection, I feel like I am that much more empowered and invested in my path of environmental education.

<note: Finally, a portion of an extraordinary reflection on the final solo. By a song-writer / scientist:>

I am very disappointed in myself. I feel like I haven't learned anything; like there's something wrong with me because I'm not having some bullshit Disney moment; I'm disappointed because I believed a fairy-tale that all the answers would come in waves if I only believed a fir-tree was an overgrown magic wand.

Why did I believe this? Why wasn't I prepared for the realities of backcountry camping? Was I lied to? No, but no one who knew better emphasized any of those realities buried like a ticks head below the surface. All those nature writers build wonderwalls around nature not to be taken down. Maybe they never meant for us to venture out or open the door and find not Willy Wonka's Chocolate Room - a luscious landscape where "everything is eatable, edible," and supplied by a chocolate waterfall, but a harsh, unpleasant, unforgiving, and uncomfortable landscape supplied by a constant downpour where you are eatable and edible. Thanks for the dream; I'm ready to wake up now.

Am I sorry I came? Hell no! I mostly feel unprepared, but I'M GLAD I'M HERE! I'm glad I got to experience this! I'm glad I had wet boots and burned my tongue on the greasy water I used to clean my cooking pot (though I'm not glad about the tick I found in my leg). There is no illusion anymore. I like identifying all the plants, listening to the rush of water and hummingbird calls, giving my hand rope-burn, and the small glances of snow-capped mountains in the distance. I feel prepared for next time, and the next, and the next. I feel that having faced this, I can handle so much more than I knew or thought of.

Maybe I did learn something.