Mattox SERC Essay

Physical Geology

The course serves the students as a basic introduction to geology, especially materials, landforms, and plate tectonics. For the department it is a useful way to attract majors and start existing majors on their academic career. For the university, we provide a general education physical science lab class. At a minimum we expose the students to the geosciences and increase their science literacy.

How do we target each group? That is a point of discussion. We’d like all of our intro courses to guide students onto a geology major without repeating a class. We are approaching agreement on what students must have in the intro class. I’d say this is about 60-70% of a semester course, so there is still room to take ownership of the course. So, although the existing and potential geology majors are in with the non-majors they are still getting basic content that is assumed to be covered in their first course.

How do we know it is working? There is some variation between professors but the students do start the second class with adequate preparation. This is basically talking with peers. No formal data. We do have an exam we can use but is not used in any formal way (some students do test out of the first course in high school).

Really, I think my course needs to be redesigned. I think I can still cover the critical content BUT in a more interesting way for the non-majors (which might hook majors) and in a greater depth for the existing geology majors.