

# Not a Teacher, But Want to Play a Really Good One in the Classroom

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*Ian Miller*

*Coastal Hazards Specialist*

*Washington Sea Grant*

*Olympic Peninsula Field Office at Peninsula College*

*Port Angeles, WA*

I am a specialist with Washington Sea Grant and my paycheck comes from the University of Washington, but my work site is at Peninsula College, a small 2-year college on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State. In return for office space I am responsible for teaching at least one class a year, and because I am also developing a research program I recruit and work with students as interns. I have significant teaching experience, but most of it is with elementary and middle school students, and most is in non-traditional, non-classroom settings. As a result, I consider myself very new at college-level instruction, and want to develop myself as a top-notch instructor. I am scheduled to teach my first course, General Oceanography, this fall quarter.

My academic background is in Ocean Sciences in general and coastal geomorphology in particular. My role at Sea Grant is as a “Coastal Hazards Specialist”, and my day-to-day is filled with a mix of research, outreach activities, and consulting with local governments on coastal issues of concern. Of late, that mix has included studying chronic erosion on the Strait of Juan de Fuca, understanding the restoration benefit of a large dam removal on the Olympic Peninsula, coordinating a working group on the impacts of climate change on the coast of Washington State, and providing science-based information products to the public and government on the risks posed by debris from the 2011 Tohoku tsunami. I feel that my background and current project slate will provide a lot of fodder for interesting class projects, but I also know that there is a lot that I need to learn to teach effectively. The title of this essay is meant to convey what I view as my challenge: I am not hired as a teacher, and have many other responsibilities, but I want to do the absolute best that I can do by the students that are in my classes or that I work with as a mentor.

The “gaps” that I need to fill are many, but I see four clear questions that I am hoping to address to improve my position as an instructor in the geosciences. They are:

1. What sorts of geoscience careers do we need to prepare students for?
2. What sorts of skills do they need to compete for those positions?
3. Of that list of skills, which can I help them with?
4. Of the skills that I can teach, what are the best teaching methods to apply?

I also realize that there are questions that I probably don't even know that I need to be asking. It is this group of questions that addresses the request of the workshop conveners, “What would I like to be doing to improve the preparation of students in two-year colleges for geoscience careers?” I am hoping to use this workshop as a foundation as I construct a teaching philosophy for myself and build the courses that I will teach over the coming years.