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Introductory course: Physical Geography – The Atmosphere

Using Geography to Open Students’ Minds

The Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University offers a curriculum that includes many aspects of the Earth sciences. In addition to our majors, a large number of other students are exposed to portions of our curriculum. Specifically, two lower-level General Education courses; GEOG 2050 Physical Geography – The Atmosphere and GEOG 2051 Physical Geography – Land and Water Surfaces, Plant and Animal Realms provide an introduction to Earth sciences for more than 1,000 students per year at LSU. I am responsible for teaching one section per semester for GEOG 2050, usually amounting to over 300 students annually.

The main goal of this introductory course is to help students learn about the world around them. Many of these students are freshmen and sophomores, and some have not declared a major. A high priority for the introductory level course is to show students that Geography can be a viable option for their major, so it is crucial that the information is presented in an interesting, informative, and challenging way. The more students we have declaring Geography as their major, the better our department will become. Students push faculty and departments to adapt to their needs, allowing us to mold and shape ourselves through the ever-changing times.

At any university, the students are the main priority – even at a research university like LSU. Without students, there would be no purpose for a university. If we have interested and engaged students, the university will thrive.

In my class, I try to provide information in a multitude of ways. I include lecture presentations using slide software (PowerPoint), in class discussions to explain those presentations, and additional study guides for the exams. For those who learn better using visuals, we often draw the most important concepts on the board, we watch videos to enforce ideas, and we have various in class activities to help solidify ideas. An example of an in-class activity includes classifying various students as different temperature air parcels. The concept of rising/sinking air and atmospheric stability becomes easy to understand when you are watching your peers rise and fall based on their temperatures in the stadium-seating lecture hall.

This introductory level course is essentially a gateway into the world of geography. This makes it vitally important to our department as well as to the university. It is my job to make this course interesting and accessible to students who would not normally think scientifically. This is why I am taking this workshop; to reach my goals more effectively.