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An earth science class in high school is often the last time students have had any geoscience experience prior to taking an introductory physical geology class at a two-year college. Because of the age diversity at a community college, that last earth science experience can sometimes have been over ten years ago. As a result, in my experience, many students do not recall basic earth science topics, including how earth science impacts their daily lives. Whether preparing future geology majors, or simply promoting earth science literacy, making earth science relevant to students is something that I believe has a lasting impact on all students.

Some students have taken a geology course at Thomas Nelson Community College with absolutely no interest in earth science at the beginning of the semester, only to completely change their intended major to geology. While this is thrilling for an instructor, what is even more exciting is knowing that this change in interests is often in large part because the material presented was in such a way that students could actually understand how geology affects them and the world around them daily. The relevancy of earth science is one aspect that I try to focus on, and continually revisit throughout the semester. When students can see geology as the world around them, not just as rocks and mineral pictures in a textbook, students are more apt to take an interest in the material.

Throughout the semester, I have student complete assignments in which they are required to look up actual data on a variety of topics. An assignment early in the semester has students research uses for minerals. In an online class, each student is required to research a mineral, reporting to the rest of the class common uses for that mineral, its market value, where it is mined, and general properties. In response to one student's report, another wrote this comment just the other week, "Too often we take the products we use for granted never realizing the great effort it takes in making these commodities. I use a few of these products on a daily basis, make-up being a priority. It gives me a totally different perspective of these products and the work put into providing me with these items." Comments such as this are not uncommon. Students have a whole different appreciation for minerals when they understand the many things that they do for our society.

Another assignment in which students are required to access current data involves earthquakes. Phenomena that often result in destruction always seem to catch the attention of many students. However, what is surprising to many is that the earthquakes reported in the news are a very small percentage of earthquakes that occur all over the world. Using real-time data from the USGS Earthquake Hazards Program, students are asked to find the number of earthquakes occurring in the United States and compare it to the number occurring world-wide. In addition, students are asked to make a connection between locations of earthquake occurrences and plate tectonic boundaries. Students are amazed that thousands of earthquakes, though many are quite small, are occurring weekly, and in places where they live or have lived. No longer does it seem like only something seen on the news.

Field experiences often have a great impact on students' perception of the geosciences. While scheduling sometimes makes it difficult, I try to incorporate a field component in all of

my classes. Sometimes it is simply a day in the field where I conduct class, and incorporate real world examples, at a place that fits with the topic, such as the beach on a day in which we would be discussing coastal processes. Other times, a field trip may include data collection that must be analyzed and synthesized in a final report. Students consistently report that field experiences help them “make sense” of the material. It allows them to see geology and the dynamic earth at work. Earth science literacy is increased when students can fit a particular idea into something that they are already familiar with, and field trips are often wonderful ways in which students can make those connections. It is on trips like this that students become engaged, even those that by all appearances were disengaged previously, and start asking questions, and sharing experiences of their own.

Assignments like these not only offer students opportunities to work with data, it reinforces the idea that science is something that they can do, and understand. For those interested in pursuing a geoscience major, they have had an experience in reading technical literature, working with data, and synthesizing it. This is a skill that will be revisited and further refined in future classes, but it is a task that will likely not seem as intimidating. Many students have approached me after completing assignments like those mentioned above only to tell me that they not only enjoyed the assignment, but want to continue learning about it, following the changes taking place. So while I’m not creating whole classes of geology majors, I’m definitely creating classes of those more interested in the world around them.