

Centralia College Professor's Immersive Teaching Style Helps Lead to State Award

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Pat Pringle

Pat Pringle is seen in this photograph taken by an associate from the Department of Natural Resources during work in the field.

Armed with a magnifying glass, hammer and a collapsible shovel, Pat Pringle leads his class of geology students toward the Mima Mounds.

Along the way, he takes every opportunity to point out geological structures, such as areas that may be prone to landslides or valleys that were carved out by ice, just so students can see it for themselves.

After arriving, Pringle immediately jumps into a trench that had the exposed deposits and starts digging, crushing rocks and throwing them out of the excavation site for students to look at while he explains their history.

"Nobody else can make a mound of dirt look that interesting," said Kylie Robinson, a student from one of his geology courses. "You can really see the passion that he has for teaching." Interactive field trips are one of the many tactics that Pringle uses to help students effectively learn. It's also one of the reasons why he is receiving the 2016 Washington State Association of College Trustees Faculty Member Award.

The ACT awards are annually given to six community college instructors in the state of Washington.

"Field experience in general, especially in earth sciences and geology, is critical," said Pringle. "The field is a natural laboratory, and students can return and analyze their findings in the school lab."

In the beginning weeks of a quarter, Pringle takes it upon himself to learn about each student in his class, learning their names, interests and how he can help them succeed.

"Many of Pat's students have gone on to follow in his footsteps. That is the sign of a great teacher and mentor," said Jim Walton, interim president for Centralia College.

"Pat is a very humble individual, but I can see how proud he is when his students get recognized for their accomplishments. He is a great scientist in his own right, but being a teacher and mentor of community college students is the calling in which he excels above all else."

Before taking a position at Centralia College, Pringle worked with the United States Geological Survey and has more than 23 years of geoscience research to share with his students.

Inside the classroom, Pringle uses his past research as examples in his daily lectures, so his students can become more knowledgeable about the geologic environment that they live in.

Robinson, who moved to Lewis County from San Antonio, Texas, took Pringle's geology class and said she had gained a new understanding of her environment.

"He has a lot of patience," Robinson said. "I would ask a million questions and he would always answer each one to make sure I understood the lesson."

With the diverse student body at Centralia College, Pringle knows that accessibility is key to student-teacher success.

By spending one-on-one time with students, Pringle said, he is able to get a better understanding of how they learn and how explaining a topic a different way can open his own mind to new ideas.

"We want students to be constantly thinking," Pringle said, "opening their minds to new ideas instead of just absorbing the information and not questioning it."

With every daily lecture, a PowerPoint is available online along with a voice recording so students can listen and go through them as many times as necessary.

"Students don't want to fail him," Walton said. "They see the lengths he goes to help them and they don't want to let him down."

Other resources that Pringle offers his students are video links from his own personal research, or articles that he has found online that all pertain to the topics in class, giving students ample information.

“Science is about discovery,” Pringle said. “Teachers know the joy of discovery and want to share it with those around them. I just can’t help how excited I get. I see the value that science has to society.”

Having an informed society is one of Pringle’s goals as an educator. He wants students prepared for the future in case of possible natural hazards such as an earthquake or flood.

“You take a certain amount of ownership for the area that you live in,” said Pringle. “It adds to being alive, knowing how your area is always changing — you really gain an appreciation for it.”

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