

Denise A. Piechnik, PhD

University of California, Davis
Dept. of Plant Biology

BIS1C: Introductory Biology – Plant Biology Lab
Enrollment: 50 (course total 400)

Course Description:

Introduction to plants, the structure and function of their tissues and organs, including some physiology. Adaptive development and evolution of plants in the context of related phyla, as a survey of cyanobacteria, algae, fungi, and multiple plant orders. Principles of population, community ecology, and ecosystems. Pre-requisites: Introduction to Chemistry. Instructors: Dr. Alan Stemler/Dr. Tom Goliber, Dr. Terrance Murphy/Dr. Tom Goliber, Dr. Eric Wada/Dr. Tom Goliber.

Students: This course was 5 quarter units (4 lecture hours, 3 lab hours) that fulfilled a general education requirement for a course in science and engineering that had a writing component. The student population enrolled varied but were usually more advanced than freshman.

Student Ratings:

Fall 2004 - Overall performance rating of 4.1 ± 0.8 by 48 respondents: 48 (100%); 5 = Excellent. Overall, most students reported that I was approachable, enthusiastic, prepared, organized, gave good explanations and that I encouraged them to think independently. For example, one student wrote in support: “She really wanted all the students to do well, but she made sure that everyone did the work and went through the steps and thought process first.” The majority of students also felt that I made an effort to interact with all students during lab, that I helped them understanding the material, and made lab fun. “Denise was very approachable & friendly & made an obvious effort to interact w/ all of the students. She tried to make herself available as often as possible and really worked hard at making sure students were learning and on task.” In addition to time management changes, I also worked on finding more examples to support lecture materials. One student wrote: “She was always willing to give extra help or give new ways to understand a concept and I really appreciate it.”

Students felt like they were rushed and did not perform well with the time limitations.

Winter 2004 - Overall performance rating of 3.9 ± 0.8 by 50 respondents (100%); 5 = Excellent. Students appreciated that I was enthusiastic, engaging, approachable, knowledgeable, and prepared. “I found Denise to be a very informative and helpful TA. She is well organized and is willing to help students... she makes the material interesting, ” and “Very helpful during office hours – good job at explaining materials/individual help during lab.” Students appreciated my encouragement for independent thought – one student wrote: “She challenges us to think on our own.”

Students felt like they were rushed and did not perform well with the time limitations.

Denise A. Piechnik, PhD

Changes:

Time management for this three hour lab was always a challenge. I tried many strategies to improve upon the time to complete a lab with an introductory lecture, multiple lab exercises, with a summary discussion/slides. Shorter, more efficient introductory lectures combined with encouraging students in their progress and time updates were the most successful tactics.