

Denise A. Piechnik, PhD

University of California, Davis  
Dept. of Entomology

ENT116: Aquatic Insects Lab  
Enrollment: <15

**Course Description:**

A study of the life history, ecology, and identification of insects associated with streams, ponds, and lakes. Labs introduced students to insect identification, sampling, and experimentation that included ecological hypothesis testing and analysis. Instructor: Dr. Sharon Lawler.

*Students:* This course is 5 quarter units (4 lecture hours, 3 lab hours) that fulfilled a general education requirement for as a science and engineering course. Students taking this course were juniors and seniors in the natural sciences and wildlife management majors.

*Responsibilities:* As TA, I primarily set up the laboratories, assisted students when performing experiments and identifying insects. I also assisted the professor with executing experiments in the field.

**Student Ratings:**

**Spring 2005** – Overall performance rating of  $4.7 \pm 0.1$  by 11 respondents (100%); 5 = Excellent.

Students appreciated that I was enthusiastic, approachable, and knowledgeable as a TA. Students unfamiliar with insect identification and using a key for identification appreciated my help. For example, one student wrote “Knows class subject matter very well. Interacts with students well and at the same time made sure everything is covered,” and “Having the help of a knowledgeable TA in lab greatly increased the amount of knowledge I gained from this class.” My approach to assisting students to identify insects using a key was to teach by a method that I use. This two-pronged approach first parses out the terms and traits to ensure their meaning, then I encouraged to combine the terms and traits in their mind as a picture as to what it should look like.

**Spring 2003** – Overall performance rating of  $4.2 \pm 1.0$  by 13 respondents (100%); 5 = Excellent.

Students liked that I was responsive to their needs and that I was accessible for them to ask questions. For example, one student wrote “Denise is very approachable and shows a genuine interest in helping students. She is very passionate about her field and her enthusiasm carries over into her teaching.”

**Spring 2002** – Overall performance rating of  $4.8 \pm 0.5$  by 12 respondents (92%); 5 = Excellent.

Students appreciated my enthusiasm helping and the knowledgeable responses to their questions. For example, one student wrote “Denise Piechnik (TA) is knowledgeable and always willing to help!” Another student wrote “Denise is very helpful during labs and in the field.”

**Changes:**

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One change that I will make is how I listen to students. Specifically, I need to listen closely to questions, and make sure that I have a clear understanding of what they are asking before I answer. A related aspect to improving my listening is to listen how a student asks a question and then gear my response accordingly.

Students have different learning styles, and some students find the lab to be a difficult learning environment. One goal I have is to develop different teaching approaches to accommodate students' learning style, and to help them resolve any difficulties in learning the material in the lab setting. For instance, encouraging students to attend smaller lab sessions, to sit away from loud discussions, or even read material out-loud if it helps to decipher keys during the identification process.

Ongoing improvement to my teaching is my continual search for good examples that demonstrate concepts that students commonly misunderstand or that are difficult.