



Experiential Learning in the Water Sciences

Impact Statement 2021

INVESTIGATORS

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SUMMARY

One of the most dynamic ways the School of Environment and Natural Resources (SENR) prepares students for careers and for graduate study is to engage them in experiential learning activities that help students integrate the concepts and skills they have gained in the classroom. SENR's undergraduate water related portfolio includes a combination of traditional classroom, the Olentangy River Wetland Research Park, and Stone Laboratory on Lake Erie; with an emphasis on providing students with robust opportunities for experiential learning.

SITUATION

Water sustains life, yet there are local and global water crises, including lack of water, poor water quality, and loss of aquatic biodiversity, demanding that we train the next generation of water scientists to meet these local and global challenges. Finding hands-on experiences, particularly across different aquatic ecosystems, can be very challenging for students. However, by prioritizing field-based lessons in aquatic systems spanning the two major Ohio watersheds, the Ohio River in the south and Lake Erie in the north, SENR seeks to provide students with the opportunity to literally get their feet wet while learning and using the skills needed to be water stewards.



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RESPONSE

Providing meaningful experiential learning opportunities has been more challenging under the COVID restrictions of the past two years. We have continued to prioritize offering hands-on, experiential learning for our students, particularly those with an interest in aquatics. Summer 2022 will see offerings return to Stone Laboratory with a full suite of ENR course offerings. The Stone Lab opportunities have been heavily marketed to all students in the School of Environment and Natural Resources, particularly those that need or want aquatic courses. In addition, a new opportunity, Semester @ Stone Lab, is being developed as an immersive pilot program with professional development, college credit courses, and exposure to research, as a fully funded 10-week experience for the students selected. SENR has additionally committed significant funding to scholarships for students attending Stone Lab with scholarship applications increasing 122% from the last application cycle. Stone Lab offers students the opportunity to learn utilizing the aquatic resources of the island and lake in a more hands-on capacity than regular offerings on campus provide.



IMPACT

Preparation for internships and employment after graduation are improved with intensive experiential learning as students more deeply develop their skills. SENR focuses on providing robust water related experiential learning to all students with an interest. SENR has a reputation for offering these types of opportunities and they play a role in the appeal of our majors to prospective students and contributes to the satisfaction of current students. Priority for scholarship funding is given to those with financial need, therefore, the scholarship funding for Stone Lab provides the opportunity for students that may not otherwise be able to engage in these types of learning experiences. We strive to provide access to educational opportunities across our student body.

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