

Sierra College
Bio. Sci. 10 - Introduction to Biology
Jim Wilson, Instructor

Letter to My Students

Welcome to our class.

You have enrolled into Sierra College's Biological Sciences program. Among the nation's colleges and universities, I believe that this college is one of the best places to learn biology. Congratulations - Good choice!

The Bio. Sci. Department has many strengths that make it outstanding, including the dedication of our students and faculty, its student centered priorities, and the hands-on laboratories and field study opportunities (which all provide real life examples and experiences). The list continues with in-class resources, the Natural History Museum, respect shown you as an adult student, special opportunities for independent study, and direct access to our team of talented faculty, classified staff and managers. These are only a few of the many reasons for my positive opinion about our Department and Sierra College District.

Starting to learn a new subject is sometimes difficult, like balancing on a hoop. Knowledge is arranged like particles on the surface of a sphere, and as a new student you land "plop", seemingly at random, on that sphere. From where ever you "land" that is your starting point. What direction do you go; what path would best help you learn is the question. With many embedded learning circles or paths surrounding you, it is partially my job, as your teacher, to assist and guide you toward positive learning paths. It is also your responsibility to choose and take action, perhaps more so in an online learning environment. Ok, so that was a bit weird - sorry.

Learning takes time. For me, it is more important that you learn and have the opportunity to do so, than to simply expose you to information (in other words, "inoculate" you with facts and figures). Although, taking a science class is similar to learning a new language, we will concentrate on biological processes, principles, and concepts, illustrated with numerous examples. I hope that you will enjoy studying biology. I also hope that in learning about biology, we will succeed in making close associations between the class topics and your life. Learning should be practical, at least sometimes – actually most of the time. Learning for fun is great, but also is learning that produces practical outcomes and improvements in your life. I hope this class will do that for you.

If you choose to make the effort to learn, I sincerely respect your commitment to do so. I want you to reach or exceed your educational goals, and I hope that working together toward that goal will be a positive experience. I will try and create a safe and comfortable environment within which you can learn and achieve. If you are trying, I will work to insure that obtaining your

educational goals is feasible in this class. As feasible, I will put in extra effort and provide you with a variety of activities, allowing you to tailor your education specifically to your interests. You will find support for your efforts and encouragement to work with your classmates as a team in many activities. I will provide you with numerous methods to contact me with questions and concerns. Within reason, I will provide flexibility, set class standards (with your help), and work within an atmosphere of fairness for all. Given all that, it still stands that you are ultimately responsible for yourself; you are free to gain from this experience or not.

When you enrolled, it is assumed that you have made certain commitments to the class and your classmates, commitments to participate and contribute. I will do so likewise. We will work together, learn together, and succeed together. If you come with enthusiasm and a good spirit, it will help all of us in the class (including your teacher) to do our best. Energy put into class equals energy or learning gained. Students set the intensity of learning and thereby assist the teacher in facilitating the class interactions. We will all benefit from your background, strong participation and perspective. I understand you have other commitments in your life, in addition to this one, and will acknowledge those if feasible and fair. Understanding that, I will try and accommodate your needs as the semester progress in order to provide a productive learning experience for you.

I am also a student. Perhaps we have more differences than similarities in our majors, in support from home, in available time, in experiences, and knowledge. We come with different levels of awareness about our own perceptions, personalities and potential capabilities. Although we are working with different backgrounds and situations, the central thread we have in common is the need and desire to learn. I believe we can learn together and enjoy the experience. Life is humorous. Biology is the study of life, so there must be something we can find to laugh about and enjoy while learning.

Learning is a challenge. As you learn the subject matter you will also be learning about yourself. Learning takes courage and work. Studying is work; studying is your job. The values of learning and personal study are many. Perhaps the greatest value is not found in the "subject" matter, it is in how learning increases your vision and ability to see and understand everything that surrounds you. With learning, failure can promote success and asking questions increases understanding. Learning changes attitudes, perspectives and perceptions. Learning promotes new ideas, associations and understandings. Learning can help you accept the changes you will encounter in your life and deal with its challenges. Learning increases your ability to learn even more, to see even more. Let go for it and have fun learning in this class.

Sincerely

Jim Wilson