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ECOLOGY STUDENTS VISIT ST. HELENS FOR TWO WEEK SUMMER COURSE

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Photo credit Kassi Iseman



Most NU students went home over this past summer, but a select few stayed behind to complete an ecology class. While this four credit science course was completed in only two weeks, the best part of the class was that for the second week, students experienced the unique opportunity of camping on Mount St. Helens and learning about the course material in a tangible environment.

The ecology course was designed to examine Northwestern ecosystems by providing students with a hands-on learning opportunity to explore real-life ecosystems that have grown from the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. The students learned several important skills, including how to practically apply classroom concepts to out-of-class activities and how to provide care for God's creation. A major part of the course was not just understanding how ecosystems work, but also explaining how students can model biblical stewardship and sustainability.

"We live in such a beautiful place...students should be able to experience nature as part of a class," said Dr. Eric Steinkamp, environmental science professor at NU.

The first week of the course began by studying ecosystems in a regular lecture-style format. After that, 10 NU students, headed by Steinkamp, embarked on their great adventure during the second week.

Steinkamp led his students to multiple sights that represented several diverse ecosystems. They went to a blast zone from the Mount St. Helens eruption, where they looked at the geology, lahars, and explosive pyroclastic flows they had learned about during the first week of lecture.

Next, the class visited a ridge overlooking the crater left from the eruption and from there, a raging river, studying how organisms such as plants, animals, and fungi all live in extreme environments. Steinkamp then took the opportunity to share a devotional with his students while surrounded by God's marvelous and wonderful creation.

"I am happiest when I am out exploring nature, and so, my favorite part of the class is that I get to explore the wonders of Creation with a bunch of curious students," Steinkamp said.

Every day ended by falling asleep to the sound of the ecosystems settling down for the night, looking forward to another adventure the next day. One such adventure was a night spent at Yale Lake, a favorite moment of Kassi Iseman, one of the students who participated in the ecology class this past summer.

"Our campsite was right on the water, and a few of us went for a swim before dinner," Iseman said.

"My life is spent joining students in the learning process and learning together," Steinkamp said. "Some of the best and easiest learning happens when immersed in the topic, and this class is designed to camp out."

Steinkamp has a genuine excitement for learning and interacting with his students. His passion for leading his students through the study of ecology also resulted in fulfilling the requirement for the four credit science class in just two weeks.

"It was a very busy and challenging two weeks, but I would definitely do it over again," Iseman said.

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