

Timothy W. Kelsey

Teaching Philosophy

I bring to my undergraduate teaching twenty-one years of experience within Penn State Extension, working with state agencies, local governments, local non-profits, and community residents. These groups are precisely the types of professionals that many Community, Environment and Development (CED) major students aspire to become. I use my real world experiences with these groups to help students learn and develop the critical thinking skills and intuition necessary for them to successfully bridge theory and practice in their professional lives. I do this both in- and out of the classroom, and believe the combination of the two is critical for student success now and in their future.

In Courses: I view the classroom as a co-learning space, and frequently use Student Centered Discussion, small group work, and other Active Learning techniques to encourage students to take ownership of their learning. This also provides students a variety of ways to learn (not just lecture). I believe it is important that students learn to apply new-found knowledge and skills in professional situations, so they can fully understand the value (and limitations) of what they're learning. Almost all of my assignments and in-class exercises thus replicate real world situations that students are likely to encounter post-graduation, and require students to write their findings for non-academic audiences, such as a county commissioner or non-profit leader. Equally importantly, I believe it is essential that students learn how to critically assess a situation and determine which knowledge and skills are appropriate to address it, because the real world problems they'll face post-graduation often are ambiguous. At first, this ambiguity can appear challenging to students conditioned in previous classes to being told what to do (such as "It must be five pages long, and use two sources and three charts"), so I use such assignments to help students learn to see ambiguity as opportunity, and to become comfortable using critical thinking skills to determine what needs to be done.

I provide students in-depth written feedback on their homework assignments, and allow students to revise and resubmit to encourage them to assess and correct what they've done. I consistently hear from students that this really helps them learn. I routinely have students interact with CED professionals in the classroom and assignments, so they can learn directly from people doing CED work and understand how what they are learning is used. In CED 475, the CED Capstone class, I create the opportunity for students to use the skills they've learned in the major by matching small student-led teams with a real client (such as a planning office or non-profit) who has a research need. I mentor the students as they work with the client to understand the client's need, implement a research approach to address this need, and present their findings. In both CED 404 and CED 430, students end the semester by spending several days focused on real world situations, working in small groups to practice assessing such situations and developing appropriate responses using the course concepts and skills. I believe this helps reinforce their critical thinking skills, gives them practice applying what they've learned, and builds their confidence in apply what they've learned.

Outside of formal classes: I believe it is important for students to have opportunities to learn outside the classroom. I routinely hire undergraduates to help me with my applied research, and I have them as co-authors on research reports and journal articles. I regularly connect other students with CED practitioners for internships and paid applied research opportunities. I serve as the academic advisor to the undergraduate CED Club, and create opportunities for students to gain hands on experiences, such as co-teaching facilitation workshops and arranging community visits with CED practitioners. With regard to my colleagues, I helped establish a teaching pedagogy group within my department, mentored junior faculty wanting to add more active learning methods to their courses, and served as the CED major's interim program coordinator, during which I led the CED faculty in revising the program's learning objectives.