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Emily Knott: Community Matters



A community is a group having something in common, whether it is a neighborhood, culture or work goal. In addition to sharing common characteristics, members of a community must interact, and it is these Interactions that help define the community. Importantly, such interactions allow synergies between members and allow the community thrive.

In the Department of Biological and Environmental Science, we are a community passionate about all aspects of the natural world, ranging from nanoscale interactions between viruses and cells to organismal and ecosystem responses to large spatial and temporal environmental changes. Because our interests and research are so diverse, it is not surprising to find some subdivision of the group. However, by interacting across these divisions we find new perspectives, both in research and in education.

At the end of last month, the community spirit of our department was highlighted by our Student Seminar Week – five days of 13 sessions and 119 presentations by both Bachelors and Masters degree students. At both levels, students either shared their research plans for their thesis projects or presented their completed research results, highlighting what they have learned along the way. It was exciting to see the range of thesis research done in the department and see the development our students'

scientific work. I, for one, am looking forward to the next Student Seminar Week to hear how the planned projects have progressed.

This was only the second such Seminar Week, but something worth continuing. Our current E-education project "Master with your friends: A Master's Thesis project promoting community and inclusion" strives to develop the Seminar Week further. We are developing new ways to encourage student interaction and to challenge both scientific thinking and communication skills. To supplement their scientific knowledge, students get experience in both giving and receiving constructive criticism, and in giving presentations.

Although the Student Seminar Week was designed with a focus on student interaction, it has the added benefit of increasing interactions among teachers and researchers in the Department. Integration of a variety of research approaches (and an open mind) allows us to find new perspectives, make discoveries and have an impact in our field. Clearly, community matters.

Emily Knott, pedagogical leader of the Department of Biological and Environmental Science, 23.5.2018