

August, 1994 - Michael E. Held, Biology

When I was invited to write this issue's tip, I was asked to discuss how my research influences my teaching. Upon reflection, I asked myself some fairly simple questions: "What kind of teaching tip can a field biologist give to his colleagues in the fields of the humanities, social sciences and business? How is research into forest systems and wetland ecology applicable to those fields?"

Upon more reflection, these questions became easier to answer. We, the faculty, are a community of scholars and researchers. Our vocation is to instill in our students an appreciation for knowledge and the use of this acquired knowledge in solving problems. But in order to do our job well, we must continuously update our own knowledge base. We must be on top of our fields and knowledgeable about the current research activities in our professional areas of study. Thus we all do research, albeit in different ways and forms. We fail our students and ourselves as scholars if we allow ourselves to fall behind, especially as the mountain of knowledge increases. We are constantly challenged to open the minds of our students to new ideas, to pull them from the realm of "Why do I need to know this?" and "Will this material be on the next test?" We meet this challenge by showing our students our enthusiasm for our fields of study and our desire to remain current. Knowledge itself is both an end and a means to an end.

So as I head out to survey a forest and slosh through a wetland, I leave you with a teaching tip from Rosaline Franklin, one of the co-discoverers of DNA. She commented to one of her colleagues as they were preparing a grant application that "We must never tell them (bureaucrats in the granting agency) how much fun research is, or they may not fund our work." While we may not be applying for grants or such, we must convey to our students the 'fun' of learning and applying knowledge gained to real world problems. This is where our own personal research activities, whatever they may be, will assist us in this very important task.