

Excellence in Teaching

Karen Brown

Earth Science & Mathematics

Karen Brown teaches courses in Earth Science and Mathematics in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Division. Karen is relatively new to Western; she has been here since 2005. Prior to coming to Western Oregon University, Karen taught for 10 years at Great Basin College in Winnemucca, Nevada.

Karen's Philosophy of Teaching "Providing resources to helping students succeed"

Karen views teaching "as all about access." Her goal as an instructor is to provide students with all the tools they need to succeed. This teaching philosophy permeates and influences everything she does as an instructor.

- ◆ Karen makes herself available to students during office hours, for 8 hours a week.
- ◆ She makes all her course related materials available to students 24/7 through her webpage. Students can access the lab assignments, class lectures, and in class activities from the website.
- ◆ She also incorporates a variety of "In Class Activities" (icas) in her classes, which are posted on her website. These assignments not only review the course material but also provide students with the opportunity to apply, analyze and evaluate course content, and to practice and work with concepts covered in class.
- ◆ The first in class activity is a worksheet with questions about the course, the instructor, the course policies, and so on. Upon completion of the assignment students know where Karen's office is located, her office hours, her website address, the date of the final exam, the attendance policy, and where they can locate the textbook used in the course.



- ◆ Karen structures the courses and assignments in a building block fashion, so that they build from one another sequentially.
- ◆ One of Karen's strengths as an instructor is her skill at working one-on-one and with small groups of students in a tutorial fashion. In her lab classes she is constantly in motion, moving from group to group, answering questions, making suggestions, and raising questions for students to consider.

Karen's philosophy of teaching is evidenced in her syllabus and course materials as well. Students in the Math 99 course receive a course packet filled with in class activities and problems. "The objective," she notes, "is to develop an understanding of the concepts." Students with math anxiety often need psychological assurance, so acknowledging their anxiety and providing them with multiple resources is important. Karen markets herself as the students' "personal math trainer," noting that she is here to help students master the material. Karen offers students a variety of ways of engaging the material (i.e., through in class activities and homework problems) and provides multiple opportunities for self assessment (i.e., homework, quizzes, and examinations). Karen also explicitly instructs and models "good math habits" to help students achieve success.

Providing students with the tools and materials they need is a way of empowering them, which Karen finds highly rewarding. Karen's concern for student learning and student success shows in everything she does as an instructor at Western, and students respond positively to that concern.

Other Interests

Karen is the Webmaster for Chapter 292 of the Experimental Aircraft Association, an organization dedicated to promoting and encouraging the sport and hobby of recreational aviation. Members also build experimental aircraft such as ultralights, in addition to antique and classic aircraft. A licensed pilot herself, Karen also coordinates the Young Eagles program. This outreach program offers children from the surrounding community a chance to fly in a small private airplane. In 2005, over 70 children in the Monmouth and Independence communities flew with members of the local EAA.

Karen enjoys gardening as well. The high elevation desert climate in Nevada made gardening challenging. Karen marvels at the abundance and variety of plants that thrive in the moist and fertile Willamette valley.

Both at work and at play, Karen nurtures growth, with her students, in her garden, and through her involvement in the local community.

