

In 1985, the Nintendo Entertainment System was released in the United States marking the beginning of the video gaming generation. I was six. Sure, I thought Super Mario Brothers was fun, but I preferred to be outside getting dirty in the woods by my house or the local creek. Time after time, I would bring little critters home much to my parents' dismay. I was a nature boy at heart destined to pursue a career in Biology.

I declared Biology as my major when I started college, not really knowing which direction in the study I would go. I considered lab work, environmental science, and even medicine. With my social life demanding extra spending money (I was quite social!), I took up a job through the university's Biology Department as both a tutor and lab instructor. It was through those experiences where I realized I wanted to teach.

I pursued a graduate degree because I wanted to teach to students at the college level, where I felt their interest in the subject matter would be greatest. I entered a Master's program in Biology that had each graduate student do multiple rotations in various labs in order to determine what area of Biology they would pursue. I chose three rotations that were all at the organismal level or higher in Biology; one which dealt with fossils and evolution of shark jaws, one that examined sexual behavior of fruit flies, and one exploring the role of climate change on pines growing in the Pacific Northwest. Truth be told, I found all three interesting, but I chose the latter simply because I liked the Plant Ecologist faculty member best. He was great mentor and he ignited my interest in Plant Ecology.

With my interests more specific, I pursued a PhD in Plant Ecology looking at the impacts of invasive plants in Florida, a hotspot for such problems. My graduate studies there had me working daily in the field. I enjoyed the sweaty long hot days, getting covered in dirt and I knew that one day my professorial lab would actually be outdoors. To further expand my knowledge base (I didn't know enough!), I picked up a post-doc position in Texas where I learned new ecological systems. After a 8 years of study in Plant Ecology, I felt chock full of knowledge and ready to pass on what I knew as a teacher.

I chose Monmouth primarily because of the coziness of it all. The small Biology department, the small class sizes felt much more personal to me. I love that I get to know all my students and when you get to know them it sure is easier to inspire them.