

## Studying Biology at a Liberal Arts Institution: Dr. Lynn Westley's Approach to Undergraduate Science at Lake Forest College

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As a graduate of Grinnell College, Dr. Lynn C. Westley, Senior Lecturer of Biology at Lake Forest College, is no stranger to the environment of a liberal arts institution. The wide-ranging fields of study and close-knit atmosphere of the liberal arts education initially drew Dr. Westley to Lake Forest College, where she has worked as a biology lecturer for nearly 15 years. Her recent appointment as Internship Liaison for the Natural Sciences brings with it even greater involvement with the college; it enables her to connect undergraduate science students with opportunities to study outside of the classroom and gain a competitive edge in the areas of research and further education.

Dr. Westley's focus lies mainly in the physiological ecology of plants. Of course, her favorite class to teach is Plant Biology, but she also enjoys teaching Ecology and Evolution "because sophomores are exciting—they're making important decisions and are at the point at which they're really learning how to be biologists."

Since the start of her teaching career, Dr. Westley has seen undergraduate science become a significantly more rigorous field of study. "When I started teaching science to undergraduates, it was very unusual for freshman and sophomores to be reading primary research articles," she says. "Now, introductory-level courses require students to read this type of literature."

In terms of teaching her philosophy, Dr. Westley emphasizes research and experience over textbooks and memorization; she believes that such methods provide progressive, competitive enhancement to the Biology curriculum. Students and faculty alike take note of Dr. Westley's emphasis on experience-based learning. In fact, Dr. Anne E. Houde, Professor of Biology at Lake Forest College, says, "if you've ever been in one of Dr. Westley's classes, you know that the lectures are not the only thing that is important."

In addition to her roles as a lecturer and internship coordinator, Dr. Westley works as the advisor of a full set of students majoring in Biology. Her connection with advisees and dedication as a professor is evident in her desire to get to her students and to help achieve their goals. "I enjoy talking to my students. And if people are interested in things that I'm interested, I know that I can help them succeed."

"What really makes her great teacher," says Dr. Houde, "is the fact that she has an amazing feel for what students are understanding from her. She gets into students' minds."

Outside of teaching, Dr. Westley is known for her work as co-author of a book on the ecological relationships between animals and plants. The lack of published work in the field of plant-animal interactions inspired Dr. Westley to write on this subject matter. "I was taking classes in graduate school," she says, "and nothing in the classes was relevant to what I was interested. That's what made me want to write the book."

Dr. Westley is also interested in the topic of allocation to reproduction in plants, and she conducts her research at a farm in central Wisconsin, where she and her family often vacation. Regardless of whether Dr. Westley is lecturing in a classroom, coordinating an internship, or conducting research, she makes evident her emphasis on the importance of experience within the field of Biology.

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