

Community Engaged Learning at the College of Southern Idaho

The College of Southern Idaho (CSI) is embarking on an exciting new journey, one that involves connecting the community and curriculum in meaningful and surprising ways with a local watershed.

Rock Creek is a local waterway that begins in the hills south of Twin Falls. After flowing past multiple campgrounds to make a gradual three-thousand-foot drop to the agricultural landscape southeast of Twin Falls, Rock Creek cuts a rugged canyon swath northwest through the city to empty its roughly sixty-mile length into the Snake River. Rock Creek is both beautiful and marginalized, transformed from being, quite literally, a town sewer and dump. Rock Creek now has a four-mile walking trail and an incorporated county park hosting an RV campground and playground. But looking closer, Rock Creek has a stubborn narrative of being undesirable, a throwaway working creek. The water quality is below acceptable based on the Department of Environmental Quality's criteria for beneficial use, and graffiti and garbage are plentiful. As such, the entire canyon and watershed is less than it could be.

However, with the Rock Creek Project, the faculty and staff from the College of Southern Idaho have taken a leadership role in initiating discussions on how to help improve the quality of this urban watershed. CSI faculty have taken the lead by bringing together a range of community entities to discuss assets and common challenges as they pertain to this watershed. Through these efforts, CSI is modeling for students what it means to strengthen the social fabric of the community within which they live. This work reinforces CSI's commitment to student success by offering opportunities for student engagement that goes beyond the classroom walls.

CSI's commitment to instructional excellence has been a driving force behind the Rock Creek Project, which is inherently interdisciplinary, offering endless opportunity for faculty and community collaboration. Rock Creek watershed and community stakeholders provide our students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum with ongoing opportunities to analyze and solve problems. Sharing the vision of the Rock Creek Project includes holding the Association of American Colleges and Universities' high-impact educational practice front and center.

Next on the horizon for CSI and the Rock Creek Project is a spring gathering that will not only symbolically show our commitment to Rock Creek but reinforce our commitment to our teaching pedagogy. Our hope is for our efforts to reinforce a sense of place and engagement for our students during their time at CSI and beyond.

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