As an educator, I am dedicated to mentoring and cultivating the minds of the next generation of natural resource professionals, so they can begin their careers well informed about the many problems that they may encounter on the job. I often guide students through basic concepts and encourage them to learn on their own (e.g., flipped classroom), in pairs (e.g., think-pair-share), or in groups (e.g., group projects). In each of my students, it is my goal to increase competence in science communication, improve scientific literacy and discernment of complex issues, and instill a source of wonder and appreciation for the natural world. Each student, undergraduate or graduate, should walk away from their university education with the following four skill sets that they can apply in their careers:

First Skill: Communication

Although many students enter the field because they believe that they will not have to interact with the public, the truth is that communication skills are vitally important to professionals in the field of natural resources. Many students leave school and have to interact with other professionals and give presentations to landowners, organizations, or children. As a result, students should be provided with several in-class opportunities learn how to communicate their ideas, both written and orally. In addition to presentations, group activities, such as roleplaying and case studies, allow the students to improve their communication skills and practice applying the knowledge that they have acquired from class.

Second Skill: Critical thinking

A university education should open students' eyes to new ideas and prepare them to think critically and creatively in the real world. My goal is to challenge students to think about and apply basic concepts in new ways to solve real problems. In introductory courses, students are provided with a foundation so they will have a solid understanding about basic concepts. In professional courses, students are encouraged, through group (undergraduate) or individual (graduate) lab or field projects, to think about the small, ecological details as well as the bigger picture. This will prepare them, as future professionals, to think about issues at different temporal and spatial scales, and to address the many problems that occur in an increasingly complex, changing world.

Third Skill: Resourcefulness

When in school, students have the benefit of having professors nearby who can answer any questions they have about course content or problems they have in the field. After they leave and start their careers, it is not quite as easy as walking down the hall to get a credible answer, so many rely on what they can find online. Because of this, educators should not only provide students with basic knowledge about the systems they may work in, but also provide them with the resources to learn more about their systems after they leave school and help them become life-long learners. To help students learn about the credible resources that are available to them, I incorporate research projects and group activities that encourage students to utilize government resources, reference books, peer-reviewed journals, and reliable websites. Students are also encouraged to build relationships with their fellow classmates and other professionals who will be invaluable connections for jobs, information, and collaborations in their future careers.

Fourth Skill: Passion, wonder, and appreciation for the natural world

Although passion is not technically a skill, it is a trait that can be acquired and/or enhanced during the course of an undergraduate or graduate career through interactions with fellow students and passionate professors. Many students come in knowing what they want to do when they leave school, but many more come in with only a small idea of what they want to do or do not know at all. My goal, as a professional, is to help students find their passion in life, whether it be in forestry, entomology, pathology, wildlife, or something completely unrelated to natural resources. Regardless of the path they choose, I wish to instill an appreciation and curiosity for the natural world in all of my students.

Above all, teaching is a two way street. As an educator, I expect to inform the students about the topics that fall within my discipline and help them grow as professionals, but the teacher should also learn from the students and grow in their own ways, becoming a better professor and professional over time. In addition to course evaluations, I typically gauge my teaching effectiveness using formative (e.g., in-class discussions, student-generated test questions) and summative (e.g., final exams, projects, and presentations) assessments. As I learn more about evidence-based teaching, I am motivated to incorporate more classroom assessment techniques, including belief/attitude surveys, research-based surveys (at the beginning and end of the semester), and minute papers.