Science Societies

Soil judging promotes location-based learning

April 22, 2020

Student contestants examine a soil profile during competition at the 2019 National Collegiate Soils Contest at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Photo by Connie Wong.

Soil judging is a field-based competitive program for undergraduate students that trains them to describe, classify, and interpret soils. It has long been anecdotally recognized by coaches and students as being a valuable educational experience, but the impacts of the event on student learning and attitudes have not been documented.

A recent article published in *Natural Sciences Education* summarizes research that measured student learning and attitudes toward multiple aspects of soil science at the beginning and end of the 2019 National Collegiate Soils Contest hosted at Cal Poly in San Luis Obsipo, CA. After a week of observing and describing more than 20 soils, students reported significant increases in learning as they related to five of the seven concepts considered with the strongest development for concepts that were locally unique or emphasized. Student attitudes were overwhelmingly positive at the beginning of the contest and were not diminished by the end of the event.

Location-based learning stood out as a benefit of the contest with environmental factors (sun, insects, and allergies) being the most common downside reported. This information should help future contests and similar field-based events to prepare for challenges and emphasize the strengths of these types of activities.

Dig deeper

Rees, G.L., & Johnson, D.K. (2020). Impact of a national collegiate soil judging competition on student learning and attitudes. *Natural Sciences Education*, *49*, e20007. **https://doi.org/10.1002/nse2.20007**

More science

Back to issue

Back to home