

PROFESSOR BERAKI WOLDEHAIMANOT



“Critical thinking is important to me. I want students to think like scientists even if they’re not scientists. That’s why I keep my classes as interactive as possible.”

When Dr. Woldehaimanot speaks, everyone listens, because he just might tell you where to find buried treasure. Working for the Ethiopian Geological Survey, he used his expertise on rock formations to determine where precious materials like gold, copper or oil could be found. And now, at West, the internationally-trained geologist is teaching students how to do the same in his Earth Sciences/Geology courses.

“I’m not just teaching scientific facts,” said Dr. Woldehaimanot. “I want my students to understand the scientific processes behind the conclusions – the ‘why’ and ‘how,’ in addition to ‘what.’”

Teaching his students how to apply science to their future careers is central to Dr. Woldehaimanot’s teaching philosophy. While many of his students may not go into geology as a profession, he wants them to develop the critical thinking skills used in any job.

Dr. Woldehaimanot developed his hands-on teaching style while teaching for 10 years at the University of Asmara in Eritrea, a mineral-rich country in northeastern Africa. He would regularly take his students to geological exploration sites, sometimes for two weeks at a time, to make sure they had field experience before beginning their careers. At West, he hopes to do something similar.

“With the San Andreas Fault and various geothermal springs within 50 miles of the campus, it’s exciting for the students to investigate what’s going on right in their own backyards,” he said. “I learned a lot from being out in the field, so I want to give my students the best I can.”

Making his job easier will be the state-of-the-art technology in the newly-constructed Math and Science Complex. Computers loaded with simulation software will allow students to predict, for example, how long it would take a tsunami to travel from Los Angeles to Hawaii.

The new facilities will help Dr. Woldehaimanot continue to expand the geology and environmental science programs. “Once students begin to see that geology can help save lives – by allowing us to predict earthquakes or find a clean source of power, for example, they’ll find it as fascinating as I do,” he said.



Learn more about the Science programs at West at www.wlac.edu/science