Narrative Reflection of Implementing Flexible Learning Projects into an Ecology Course
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Implementing two EREN-NEON Flexible Learning Projects into my in-person ecology course and participating in the Faculty Mentoring Network was well worth my time. The opportunity enabled me to provide my students with fun, engaging, and authentic lab experiences that enhanced their understanding of ecology. At the same time, implementing these projects was relatively easy and straightforward for me thanks to the time and effort of the FLP and EREN leaders in developing these largely "ready-to-go" modules. I especially appreciated this because it was my first semester in a new faculty position and it had been 15 years since I last taught an upper level ecology course.

Our class participated in Backyard Beetles & Pollinators and the Lichens in Diverse Landscape, devoting a lecture period and two lab periods to each project. The students especially enjoyed the field components of each project, and I think I could have had them do more observation plots and trees than we did. I sensed that they were not as excited about the data analysis activities, and in hindsight I think I gave them too much to do and was taking them through the analyses too quickly (especially for the lichen lab). However, from my course evaluations it seems that at least some of the students appreciated honing their data analysis skills and even commented that it was good preparation for graduate school (yes, I did tell them this, but it's nice to see they listened and agreed!). We did not do much with NEON data, although I did explain to the students what NEON is about, as well as macroecology more broadly. I aimed for my students to understand the different scales of inquiry in ecology – for example, what research questions can we explore using just our class data and what research questions could be explored using all participants' data and/or NEON data? In the future I hope strengthen my own proficiency in working with large datasets so that I can better incorporate big data into my teaching.