

## Geosciences dual credit classes on tap

### DUAL CREDIT GEOSCIENCE

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As a way of getting students interested in an industry vital to the Permian Basin and giving them a nudge toward college, University of Texas Permian Basin is offering a **dual credit geosciences** course this year.

Michael Zavada, chair of **geosciences** and a professor of geology and biology, said part of the strategy was to offer in-person university **classes** at Odessa and Permian high schools. The **classes** will be taught by Faculty Associate Adjunct Joshua Swigart.

Previously, Zavada said they offered most of their **dual credit** online.

“The UT-Permian Basin **Geosciences** Department is very excited about the new **dual credit** program being offered in conjunction with **ECISD**. We feel that by offering **dual credit** geoscience courses at OHS and Permian, we are offering high school students the opportunity to get an early look into a possible career in the **geosciences**,” Swigart said in an email. “I believe our students in the Permian Basin often leave high school without the knowledge of how ornately entwined geology is to the area. The Permian Basin’s economy has an extended history of dependence upon the petroleum and natural gas industry. As such, geologists will continue to be needed to find and map new formations that may hold reserves, as well as correct environmental problems that may arise as a result of production.”

“The possibilities **for** a career in geoscience are endless and have taken me to any location I wanted to go in life and was able to achieve any dream or goal I may have had. Now I am able to pass that knowledge of those experiences in petroleum production and environmental consulting **on** to another generation and it is truly rewarding,” Swigart added.

He said teaching **dual credit geosciences** was challenging at first with the courses online the first month and then moving to hybridized **classes**.

“I believe this has forced us to use the technology available to teach in a new and different way that is very dynamic and modernized. We are now able to bring in experts in industry weekly, via video-chat, from all over the world to speak of their exciting experiences in the **geosciences**. This will be extremely beneficial to the students, and will broaden their horizons as to the thousands of opportunities available in the **geosciences**,” Swigart wrote.

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**Faculty Associate Adjunct Joshua Swigart** will be teaching **dual-credit** geoscience courses at Odessa High School and Permian High School. The program will expose high school students to potential careers in geoscience fields.

**BEN POWELL | ODESSA AMERICAN**

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## Classes

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“The UT-Permian Basin’s Geoscience Department wants to innovate **dual credit** course offerings by offering these courses at Permian and OHS campuses, with the idea in mind that we want to eliminate any hurdles that may exist as result of driving distance to class, time available, or college seeming overwhelming. A scholarship has also been applied this semester toward tuition by a petroleum producer to allow these students to take these courses at no cost to them. Students can enter the **Geosciences** Program having already taken their freshman-level courses and can move straight into electives and courses required **for** our various geoscience majors. We are very excited about the prospect of having these students in our program, as they will have already been orientated to our department; reducing the challenges associated with starting college,” he added.

Zavada said Swigart will teach from the high schools.

There also will be field trips at least once or twice a semester, Zavada said.

“This is also something industry told us when we were working with them — and we still are — they want students when they graduate, both in undergraduate and master’s level, to be able to go into the field, do a project and feel comfortable doing that, so we’ve decided to bring that element to the freshman **classes** to try to get them, again, acclimated to doing things that industry wants them to do and we want them to do. That will prepare them **for** graduate school ...,” he added.

**ECISD** Chief Innovation Officer Jason Osborne obtained some funds from a Chevron grant, which were **for** PICK Education initiatives.

But since the new **geosciences** course involves hands-**on** and real-world connections during student learning, “We decided to use some of these funds to fully support tuition and books in a number of student scholarships,” Osborne said in a text message.

“We hope to grow this academic pathway and UTPB partnership **for** years to come,” Osborne stated.

Zavada said it would further cut the cost of the course.

He said the university is hoping to have at least 10 students in the class, but up to 15 can be funded.

“We’re hoping it will grow after that, once students start taking the course and realize that this is a much better venue **for** learning and much more exciting than even just being online all the time,” Zavada said.

Offering the course also is important because there is a shortage of people in science, technology, engineering and math.

“One of the problems is when they go to high school and go directly to college without ever having an experience like this is there are people that are interested, but fearful of it. When I say acclimate it is to get rid of that fear that students have. You’re going to make mistakes sometimes. It’s just not going to go well. Another study, **for** instance, found that most successful students are the ones that know how to deal with failure, not necessarily that do the best in class ...,” Zavada said.

“If we get them used to people — being able to approach people — professors, graduate students other students and ask questions and help them get through these difficult times, they’ll be more successful in the long run. I think that’s what we’re really talking about in all this,” he added.

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