



E-Learning: opportunity or end of field classes?

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E-Learning is often seen as an opportunity to avoid the costs of field classes by using new digital media to communicate content to students that otherwise could only be seen in the field. However, feeling, tasting and smelling soil on a farm or in a forest cannot be substituted via the internet. To achieve some teaching efficiency, an course on e-learning introduced at the University of Basel therefore took an opposite approach: instead of compromising the field experience, the opportunities to broaden access and generate flexibility for the students and instructors during the lecture room section of a soil science and land use course were maximised. The course has six topics, each e-learning element is designed to take one week of the students' self study time devoted to the course. Three one-day field classes spread over the term offer an opportunity to the students to become acquainted with common soil types in the region of Basel and typical land use. The latter emphasizes visits to farms to ensure that the perspective of the farmers on their soils and business is communicated to the students. The field classes also ensure sufficient contact time between instructors and students. The informal time spend together during the days in the field also ensures to address individual questions of the students. Overall, the format of the course ensures that the field experience and instructor presence are offered where needed and that e-learning is used to replace formal contact time where self-study is possible.