



SONNY S. BLEICHER, Ph.D.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST, ECOLOGIST, AND EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGIST

August 3rd, 2025
Search Committee
Deep Springs College
Big Pine, CA 93513

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my portfolio for your consideration for the position of Natural Science Chair. I have followed Deep Springs College as a potential professional home for many years, drawn to its unique integration of education, labor, and community living. Although I have been tempted in the past to apply for faculty positions at the College, I chose to wait for an opening that aligns as precisely with my training, experience, and pedagogical philosophy as this one does. With a background in evolutionary ecology, environmental science, and field-based education—including in remote environments requiring communal living and labor-sharing—I believe I can contribute meaningfully to the scientific, pedagogical, and civic missions of Deep Springs.

Over the past decade, I have developed and taught a wide range of undergraduate courses in ecology and environmental science, including behavioral ecology, conservation biology, biogeography, urban ecology, and environmental policy. Among them, I designed and taught a course on Water Policy, Politics, and Conflict that features a focused case study on the Owens Valley—offering students a direct entry point into the socio-environmental history of the region where Deep Springs is located. My teaching emphasizes experiential learning, interdisciplinary synthesis, and student-led research—approaches particularly well suited to the College's rigorous and immersive liberal arts model.

My leadership experience extends beyond academia into applied conservation and public science communication. As Research and Education Development Manager at the Felidae Conservation Fund, I coordinated field operations in Northern California, managing teams of citizen scientists conducting ecological surveys and camera trap deployments in fragmented wildlife corridors. I also led a pedagogic team that developed and implemented extracurricular education programs for K–12 schools, and delivered public talks at venues ranging from environmental fairs to Rotary and book clubs. In addition to managing operations and outreach, I was responsible for writing and coordinating grant applications focused on public education and citizen science, securing developmental funding to expand both classroom and community engagement. This role deepened my understanding of conservation practice in California, and through my participation in the California Mountain Lion Scientific Workgroup, I collaborated with stakeholders from across state agencies and nonprofit organizations to inform apex predator policy and outreach across the region.

Equally important is my long-standing engagement with remote, place-based learning environments. I have lived and worked in settings that mirror the immersive structure of Deep Springs: a kibbutz-style academic program at the Blaustein Institutes for Desert Research in Israel; communal research housing at the Konnevesi Research Station in Finland; and a field-based ecological outpost at Ethabuka Station in Australia's Simpson Desert. These experiences cultivated in me not only a high tolerance but a strong appreciation for physically and intellectually integrated living. They also demonstrate my ability to thrive in the self-sufficient, student-led context that defines life at Deep Springs.



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I also bring a robust scientific background in arid and dryland ecology, including formal graduate training and fieldwork across the desert ecosystems of the Southwestern United States. My early research focused on predator-prey dynamics, information ecology, and habitat use in the Chihuahuan, Sonoran, and Mojave Deserts. This includes multiple field campaigns in the Great Basin Desert, working within the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada—experiences that have deeply shaped both my ecological perspective and my field teaching. These landscapes are not abstract subjects of study for me; they are places I have worked, lived, and taught in. I would be eager to connect this expertise to Deep Springs students through field-based instruction embedded in the regional terrain and climate.

I bring to this position a demonstrated commitment to interdisciplinary and inclusive pedagogy. I have served on curriculum redesign committees, most recently leading efforts to revise introductory organismal biology at Xavier University of Louisiana, an HBCU. Across institutions, I have coordinated undergraduate research labs—often with more than two dozen students—focusing on accessible, field-based ecological research that meets students where they are, rather than removing them from their social or educational contexts. These efforts have produced student-authored publications, successful graduate placements, and a mentoring style rooted in equity, relevance, and professional development. My students, the majority of whom are women and underrepresented minorities, have pursued projects spanning urban ecology, behavioral adaptation, and invasive species management—many of which translate directly to the kinds of field-based inquiry possible in the California Great Basin.

As a scientist, my research examines how infrastructure, land-use change, and environmental inequality alter species distributions and behavior. My recent projects focus on invasive species ecology, predator-prey dynamics, and urban biodiversity, including investigations into how historical redlining practices shape ecological communities. My published work spans foraging behavior, risk perception, and community structure, particularly in arid and semi-arid ecosystems—settings well aligned with the regional context of Deep Springs. I look forward to integrating this scholarship into hands-on courses and collaborative student research grounded in the College's immediate environment.

What draws me most to Deep Springs is its integrated vision of education—one that weaves together academic inquiry, communal labor, and the moral development of its students. I am fully prepared to contribute not only as a teacher and scientist, but also as a community member participating in shared labor, residence life, and self-governance. Few institutions ask as much of their faculty as Deep Springs does, and even fewer offer such meaningful opportunities to engage students as whole individuals. I would be honored to take part in that work.

Thank you for considering my application. I would be pleased to provide additional information to assist in your evaluation of my fit for this role, and I hope to do so in a positive light.

Sincerely,
Sonny S. Bleicher, Ph.D.