

Professor Profile: Nick Pollock

Geology professor prompts questions and research within Honors

BY VANESSA EVELETH ('23)

A relatively new addition to the Westminster College community is Honors and geology professor Nick Pollock, who received his Ph.D. at Boise State University.

Originally from Ohio, Pollock was hired to teach in fall of 2020. Pollock said he applied for Westminster's position because of the opportunity to teach a broader range of classes and students in the Honors college.

"The ability to teach a class with a colleague in a completely separate discipline is really cool," Pollock said. "I feel like I learn so much in these Honors classes, both from the students but also from my co-instructors—which is an amazing experience that I don't think happens all that frequently in other places."

In true Honors fashion, Pollock said his interest in geology began with questions. Relative to other sciences, people have a poor grasp of how the Earth works, according to Pollock.

"Our modern understanding of geology really only evolved about 60 years ago," Pollock said. "So there's still a lot of big questions that need answering in geology."

Pollock said he also applied as a professor at Westminster because of the interesting geological environment of Utah and the West.

"It's fun to be able to think about those big [geological]

questions, to get students interested in those big questions, and to seek answers to those questions through research," Pollock said.

Pollock's specific interest is in natural hazards, and here in Utah those geologic hazards happen after wildfires—known as debris flows. Debris flows are when mixtures of soil, rocks, and water are carried down slope after intense rainfall in an area recently burned by a wildfire, according to Pollock.

"Historically, these have been a problem throughout Central Utah," Pollock said. "So we're worried about growing communities where they're growing into the foothills, and the foothills are where these post-wildfire debris flows happen."

Pollock said he works with Westminster students to look at how often these debris flows happened in the past, how climate change will affect their frequency, and how severe they might become in the future.

"I like the field, specifically, because it's right at the interface of communities and people and the science itself," Pollock said. "Geological hazards are something that almost everyone will experience at some point in their lives, and so it's an important and exciting field for people to care about." *HML.*



Dr. Nick Pollock, Honors and geology professor.

Photo courtesy of Ceci Rigby