Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased that you are considering adopting Essentials of Oceanography for your course. It is specifically designed to be an up-to-date, pedagogically complete teaching aid that aims to enhance your students’ understanding of the ocean. In fact, the 10th Edition of Essentials received a prestigious 2012 Textbook and Academic Authors Association "Texty" textbook excellence award.

You might be interested to know how I got involved in co-authoring the textbook with Hal Thurman. I first met Hal during a geoscience educator’s field trip to Baja California in 1991. We talked in great detail about the book and I was thrilled to have a textbook author listen to my ideas about improving his textbook. When Hal retired from teaching in 1995, he remembered me and liked my ideas, so he invited me to co-author Essentials with him. I wasn’t sure what I was getting myself into, but I accepted. Looking back over the past 28 years and eight editions, it’s been a thrilling ride to be involved in crafting the text into a useful resource for teaching oceanography. Sadly, Hal passed away in late 2012; I’ll miss his writing expertise, knowledge about the ocean, and easy-going demeanor.

As I work on the textbook, one underlying principle I try to keep in mind is to write the book in a similar way to how I teach the subject matter in my classes (the technique is called “teach writing”). This includes employing useful analogies, cutting-edge scientific discoveries, interesting stories, and even appropriate humor to get a point across.

If you’re curious about the reading level, a reading comprehension analysis has been performed on the text. Various aspects of the text are analyzed, including overall organization, sentence structure, and use of terminology. I’m pleased to report that the reading level is exactly appropriate for what first-year college students ought to be able to comprehend.

However, as instructors, we all know the challenge of getting our students to read the textbook. In my classes, I’ve asked students how they use the textbook and many students—rather honestly—indicate that they just skim the book. I would love for all my students to read each chapter, but I know they have busy lives. That’s why I’ve designed the book around the figures to let the figures tell the story of the chapter. That way, students can benefit from viewing just the figures, which tell a coherent picture of the main concepts within each chapter. In addition, the 13th Edition features short narrated instructional videos called SmartFigures/SmartTables.

New features in this edition include: (1) a new boxed “Process of Science” feature in most chapters emphasizing the scientific process by highlighting an area of oceanographic inquiry and explicitly pointing out how the process of science was used in that particular case; (2) a new “Exploring Data” feature, which directs students to engage with data and check their understanding by asking data interpretation questions related to data-rich figures, graphs, tables, and maps; and (3) a new “Creature Feature” that showcases a marine organism that is relevant to each chapter’s content.

Another thing you may notice about the 13th Edition is that over half of the illustrations have been revised for this edition. And, the overall structure of the book presents material in easily-digestible chunks, along with Concept Checks at the end of each section. In addition, students will benefit from the array of Web resources such as geoscience animations, recaps in every section, testing modules in Mastering Oceanography, and Web videos with embedded QR codes. These items are designed to help students grasp important concepts and processes.

I hope that you’ll find the text appropriate for your course and take advantage of the many ancillaries that are designed to help you teach effectively. When you adopt my textbook, in a sense, you’re adopting me as well. I enjoy communicating with other instructors about teaching oceanography, so please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Alan P. Trujillo

Distinguished Teaching Professor
Department of Earth, Space, and Environmental Sciences
atrujillo@palomar.edu

Palomar College
Learning for Success

1140 West Mission Road
San Marcos, CA 92069-1487
760/744-1150
www.palomar.edu

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