Great Salt Lake Institute: Halophiles for Teachers, Students and the Community
Jaimi Butler

Westminster College is uniquely situated between the Wasatch Mountains to the east and Great Salt Lake to the west. We are firmly rooted in an urban landscape in a major metropolitan area adjacent to one of the great terminal lakes of the world. Proximity and passion for the lake and its inhabitants led to creation of Great Salt Lake Institute (GSLI) at Westminster College. Attracting an unusual blend of funding, GSLI has developed a vision that embodies research, education and community outreach.

In the seven years of Great Salt Lake Institute’s existence, this small college organization has become a beacon for activity surrounding our salty neighbor. With only one faculty and one full time staff member, GSLI would not be as successful or prolific without our undergraduate students. Our undergraduate students engage in research, serve as mentors for high school summer camp, develop cross-disciplinary activities, and learn outdoor leadership skills. The mission of GSLI has developed in response to our successful programs: We endeavor to engage in place-based teaching and learning, to facilitate interdisciplinary research on Great Salt Lake, and to promote community excitement about this unique ecosystem. Assessment of our programming shows an increase in student retention, leadership skills, graduation rates, hands-on learning, and career opportunities.

This presentation will underscore the value of halophiles in educational settings. At GSLI, halophiles have been a featured component of undergraduate research, K-12 curriculum development for classrooms, arts integration with science, and fieldwork. These valuable research models, when placed in the context of their environment, become charismatic microfauna, engaging students, researchers and the broader community.