

# The teacher files

## Sociology instructor keeps it real

BY KATIE ARCHER

It's about second chances. Not only his, but the second chances of the students he teaches. Sociology instructor Erich Pfeifer has been at Clackamas Community College about eight years now. Pfeifer also teaches a pre-fall college success class for incoming athletes, before fall term starts.

### The Clackamas Print: How did you get to CCC?

**Erich Pfeifer:** Let's see. I have been in the Army. I worked at a diversionary program for kids who have been arrested for different things, so I was a lead counselor there for a number of years. I worked on a program, in Portland, trying to help young kids make a positive connection with education. I went to PCC [Portland Community College] and I felt like they didn't respect the students that they were working with, at least the people that I was around. I did a consulting job out here. I met people at Clackamas and I found that there were some good people out here, so that's what brought me to Clackamas.

I grew up in southern California and I didn't like school, didn't have a good relationship with school growing up. So I had to turn things around for myself and figure out how to be a good student. Having gone through all that, I had some good experiences as a student at the community college, so I like the community college and what it makes available to people. I decided to come back to the community college because I wanted to try to help other people who are trying to do what I was trying to do, when I was trying to get an education.

### TCP: What do you hope to accomplish when you teach your students?

**Pfeifer:** I want to help people succeed in college so that they can earn a degree and be able to use that degree in the real world to make their lives better. I hope to encourage people to think for themselves and try to dismantle some of the misunderstanding that we have in our society that result in people leading lives that are not authentic and real to who they want to be and what they want to do. I want to help people question things, figure out answers for themselves, ask questions about the society and how we share things with each other, but ultimately I want to help people learn how to be successful in college so that they can get a degree, in a credential society, that requires a degree to get access to a certain standard of living and quality of life. I want them to not only learn to succeed in college but learn how to use that degree in the real world to make their life better.

### TCP: What life experiences do you use to teach your classes?

**Pfeifer:** Everything I've been through, my whole life comes into how I teach. Some of the most important life experiences are that I didn't grow up in the easiest way, so I've been a lot of things as a person myself, so I have a lot of respect of anybody who's struggling with things in their life and trying to turn their life around with an education. The most important experience I've ever had in my life that prepared me was working in Portland at a place called Albina Head Start, where I worked for five years. In that period of time, I was pretty much the only white person everywhere I went. In my job, I learned the most important lessons in my life about how to treat other people, see other people, how to get past the stereotypes we have in our society and see who people really are on the inside and reach across the things that divide us to see that we're all the same.

Read more of this interview at [TheClackamasPrint.com](http://TheClackamasPrint.com).

*This interview has been edited for clarity and space.*



Photo contributed by Erich Pfeifer

Pfeifer



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**ON THE COVER:** Former PSU cross country runner, Jose Macias, now runs for CCC.

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