Meet Max Portmann

MS Biology Program

What is your Area of Study / Research?
I study coastal and plant ecology. My research is on biomass allocation in recovering Avicennia germinans (black mangrove) after widespread mortality post-freeze-disturbance on the Texas Gulf Coast.

What drew you to your field?
I always enjoyed being outside and wanted to find some profession that would allow me to work outside. After a few years of college and a wide variety of courses, I became really fascinated with coastal and plant ecology! If I didn’t end up at TAMUCC studying mangroves, I would probably be somewhere else studying tropical/sub-tropical plant ecology.

What strategies do you use to be successful in your grad program?
I try to be as flexible as possible with my schedule and tasks. Sometimes I’m in the mood and mindset to work on one project over another. So as soon as I have the motivation to work on a specific thing, I work on it as long as I can get quality work done. Then, I take a break and pick it back up or do another task. Depending on due dates and workload, it doesn’t always go smoothly, but it works well for me overall.

Give us 5 adjectives that describe you as a scholar.
Dedicated, curious, friendly, compassionate, and chaotic

What is the best advice you have been given?
To take lots of pictures. It’s something I sometimes forget to do, but it’s really nice to have pictures of memories with friends and family, especially lost loved ones. I also received this same advice in academia. Taking excessive amounts of pictures in the field and lab has made presenting my research much easier because showing pictures along with an explanation or story is always helpful!

What is your favorite thing about being a student at TAMU-CC?
I’ve really enjoyed the split courses that have a mix of graduate and undergraduate students. Having to learn and teach to some degree has been very rewarding. In the couple of split courses I’ve taken so far, I’ve had some fascinating conversations with undergrads and learned a few things along the way!

What resources or opportunities that TAMUCC provides have been most valuable to you?
The College of Graduate Studies has been extremely helpful. Their GROW room is a nice resource and I really appreciate the graduate student appreciation week. Also, they organized a trip to College Station for the TAMU Pathways Symposium which was a great experience!

Who are your favorite writers?
To list a few: For historical related writings, I’ve been enjoying Dr. Walter Rodney’s work recently. For screenwriting, Andrei Tarkovsky. For academic writing in my field, I would say Dr. Candy Feller. She has done some amazing research and is very talented at communicating it. Getting the chance to meet her in person and talk about mangroves has made me appreciate her work even more!

If stranded on a deserted island, name three people (dead or alive), two objects, and one food you would want with you.
George Washington Carver (to help find/harvest/talk about edible plants), Eiichiro Oda (storytelling), and my great aunt Til (she went by Crazy Aunt Til). She was a lot of fun to be around if you can’t tell by her nickname and she liked to camp. For my objects, I’d bring a big pot for cooking and a machete. For food, I’d want a big smoked hog. It’s one of my favorites and it’s great for sharing.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
Hopefully still doing research! I’d like to do a Ph.D. following my master’s so ideally, I would be finishing the Ph.D. around that time and figuring out my next step.