



# Welcome to Fly Fishing U

*by George Daniel*

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*photos by the author*

One goal of higher education is preparing students for their future careers in what appears to be an endless array of career paths. At Penn State, we understand the importance of preparing our students for the workforce. But, we also understand the absolute necessity to provide our students with the tools they need to live a healthy life (both physically and mentally) when away from work. This is why Penn State students have the option to earn college credits while learning to fly fish.

Fly fishing is not a major. Instead, our fly fishing courses are electives and count towards a GHW (General Health and Wellness) credit. Fly fishing for credit is not a new concept at Penn State as students have had the opportunity to earn college credits while enrolling in a fly fishing course for 75 years. George Harvey, a fly fishing legend, began teaching fly fishing at Penn State in the 1930s and later fly fishing became a credited course in 1947—the first in the nation and possibly the world. During his 30-year career at Penn State, George Harvey taught more than 36,000 students how to fly fish. Eventually, living legend Joe Humphreys took over the program and taught the course for 19 years. During his career, Joe Humphreys developed an international reputation as one of the best fly anglers in the world and brought much acclaim to the Penn State's Angling Program. As a result of a generous donation in January 2022, the program was renamed the Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program. After Humphreys retired, the program was carried on by other excellent instructors including Vance McCollough, Mark Belden, Greg Hoover, and Steve Sywensky. Today, the program has a full-time director/instructor and a part-time instructor with one goal in mind—to continue the world-renowned fly fishing legacy at Penn State.

Besides fooling the occasional fish with a fly students tie themselves, the mission of the Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program is:

1. **Use fly fishing as a tool to break down racial, socioeconomic, and cultural differences to help build a stronger and more unified community.** Fly fishing communities are similar to university alumni associations, where members of each group support members of their own community. Fly fishing



is one activity that normally unites instead of separating groups. By the simple act of introducing underrepresented groups to the wonderful world of fly fishing, we hope to create a collaborative culture of fly anglers.

2. **Develop a lifelong pursuit.** Although we hope many of our students continue to pursue fly fishing after graduation, the real purpose of the Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program is exposing our students to one of countless outdoor leisure pursuits. As 93-year-old Joe Humphreys continues to say, “the secret to life is having something to look forward to.” The basic fly tying and fly fishing skills each student learns with our fly fishing program will provide a lifetime of enjoyment.
3. **Allow the act of fly fishing to organically create the next generation of stewards and conservationists.** Fly anglers are major stockholders of our natural resources and public lands. All fly anglers have a vested interest in preserving and protecting natural resources and clean water. The greater our angling community becomes now and in the future, the stronger our efforts will be towards protecting vital resources.





*Students enrolled in the advanced fly fishing course take part in a guided fly fishing experience each semester.*

**4. Create outreach initiatives for staying connected to alumni and friends of the Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program.** Virtual and in-person fly fishing events, along with a social media presence, will occur to stay connected with our fly fishing community.

Countless academic programs, famous sport programs, athletes, and coaches come to mind when people hear “Penn State University.” However, within the small fly fishing community, Penn State is known as “Fly Fishing U.” We are proud of our deep academic fly fishing history. We are thankful for the handful of amazing fly fishing instructors who helped build, mold, evolve, and promote our fly fishing program over the years. We are enthusiastic about continuing to expose our students to one of life’s greatest leisure activities. We are passionate about providing our students the tools needed to not only achieve success with their professional lives, but perhaps, more important, live exceptional personal lives. We are Fly Fishing U.

In future issues, current Joe Humphreys Fly Fishing Program students will be sharing their fly fishing experiences with you as they learn fly fishing, fly tying, conservation, angling ethics, and other skills throughout the course. We hope you enjoy their stories and experiences just as much as we enjoy teaching fly fishing skills to these future anglers and conservationists. ☐



*Students prepare rigging in preparation for a field trip to Fisherman's Paradise, Centre County.*



*A student shows off a beautiful Brown Trout caught during a rainy outing. Students learn that sometimes the best fishing occurs during rainy days.*



*A Penn State fly fishing student with a box of flies tied during a semester.*