

## California Water Institute Provides Project Opportunities for Students Classroom Case Study

### Fresno State Animation and Intermedia “The Water Cycle and Our Neighborhood Watershed”

Fresno State art students were the creative force behind an animation project that brought an educational graphic to life for the California Water Institute (CWI). Students in the university's Animation and Intermedia program produced a 2D animation video highlighting the San Joaquin Valley's water cycle and watershed.

CWI worked with Paula Durette, professor of Animation and Intermedia, who recruited two students to work on the project over the summer of 2021. The students focused on an existing illustrated graphic that mapped out in detail how the water cycle works within a watershed. The project was geared toward an audience of junior high school students.

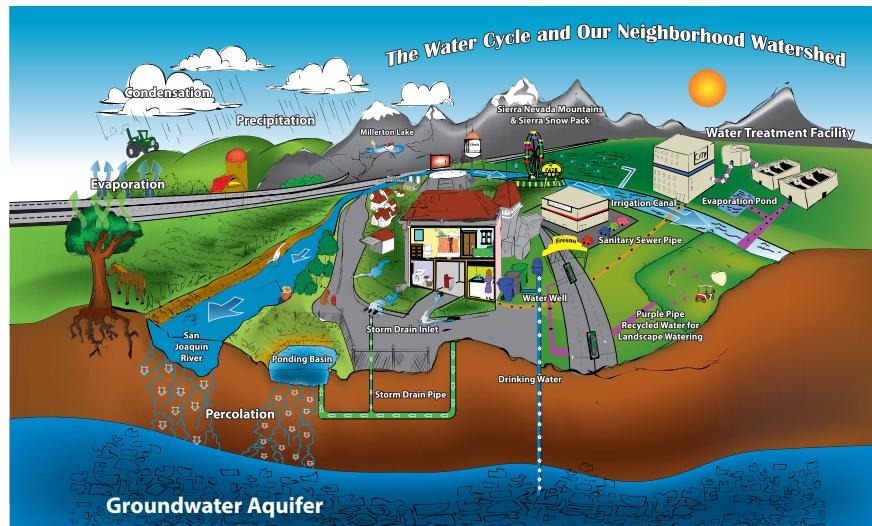
“Our job was to make it more entertaining for students. We created an animation utilizing that graphic that was already there, and we created a character that was a water droplet,” said Durette.

The students proposed different types of characters before settling on one approved by CWI. The 2D animation takes the water droplet character on a tour through the graphic. Students collaborated with CWI to approve a script that was voiced and recorded for the video, helping to educate viewers on how water is reclaimed and utilized as part of our water system.

“The water cycle video they created does exactly what we hoped. It takes something everyone needs to understand and presents it in a way that's specific to our county and easy to grasp,” said CWI Director Laura Ramos. “This kind of partnership benefits everyone: students gain practical skills, our institute achieves its educational goals, and the community is better informed.”

Professor Durette said the process gave students a real-world experience of working in a freelance capacity with a client-driven creative project that included meeting deadlines, providing deliverables, and passing stages of approval. This entrepreneurial exercise was especially impactful for students seeking to navigate art careers in the San Joaquin Valley, an area that lacks traditional creative opportunities found in larger cities.

“Students have a choice when it comes to animation. They tend to move out of the area to go to the bigger industries because we don't have an animation industry in Fresno. But if they want to stay locally, they have to learn how to be more nimble and self-starting,” Durette said.



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That includes seeking creative projects within other industries and disciplines such as science fields, business, and agriculture. Jacob Carson was one of the students who worked on the animation for CWI – it was his first 2D art project. Carson graduated in 2021 with a Bachelor of Arts in Art, with an emphasis in animation. Since then, he's been able to translate his animation skills into other professional avenues. Carson said the project introduced him to a different style of art.

"My natural drawing style is a little bit more on the realistic side, especially with digital painting. So, that was a stretching moment for me," Carson said. "I was learning a branding opportunity to make that water drop and then dealing with facts that had to match up with the animation."

Carson now designs characters and mascots at ImagineU Children's Museum in Visalia. He said having CWI's animation project in his student portfolio helped him find work in a career field for children. Carson acknowledged the challenges in finding creative work in the Central Valley, but said this project opened his eyes to other opportunities.

"I think we default to art as being painters with berets in galleries, but there are a lot of things you can do with digital art, especially on the commercial side," Carson said.

Professor Durette outlined other ways in which this project benefitted students: giving them the ability to work with a local organization, making it accessible to students and allowing them to work both in a team and individually, and opening a pathway to working with projects that appeal to children.

"CWI believes that science communication works best when it's local, visual, and accessible. Partnering with Fresno State students allowed us to put that belief into practice while giving future professionals real experience in public education," said CWI Director Laura Ramos.

After first partnering with CWI on the educational water cycle video, Fresno State's animation department has also partnered with Storyland Fresno on several projects, keeping more creative work local.

