



Coach Jaclyn Fiola, Logan Russell '23, Emmy Traband '24, Marabelle Burkert '24, Soleil Sklencar '24, Melanie Earl '24, Sarah deBeaumont '25, Jacob Kwiatkowski '24, Dan Steinberg '25, and Coach Steve Dadio.

Delaware Valley Soil Judging Team Qualifies for National Contest with Runner-Up Finish at Regionals

The Delaware Valley University soil judging team qualified for the National Soil Judging Contest by claiming second place at the Northeast Regional Soil Judging Contest hosted by Penn State University in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania.

The competition featured 64 students from nine institutions and several Aggies took home individual awards including Melanie Earl (5th Place), Logan Russell (10th Place), Dan Steinberg (14th Place), and Marabelle Burkert (19th Place).

DeVal placed fourth in the group judging portion of the contest, propelling them to a second-place overall finish. The University of Delaware (1st) and the University of Maryland (3rd) rounded out the top three overall teams. Along with host team Penn State, these four schools will represent the Northeast Region at the 2024 National Soil Judging Contest hosted by Iowa State University.

The students spent two days immersed in practice soil test pits followed by a full day of competition about soils and land-use in Northcentral Pennsylvania. They described 15 soil profiles with a range of interesting properties, classified them according to USDA Soil Taxonomy, and interpreted them for water holding capacity, erosion potential, septic absorption fields, farmland potential, and more.

The practice site showcased soils of the Appalachian Plateau including multiple fragipans (dense soil horizons that limit water movement and root growth), shale bedrock, and even some coal seams! Three practice profiles were on a restored strip mine – those soils are very young and were challenging to sample and describe. The students readily used their sieves to separate rock from soil and became experts at differentiating silty clay loams from silt loam textures. The contest day was hazy and cool, but the students showed up ready to judge soils.

Soil judging contests are the epitome of experiential learning in soil science, giving students the opportunity to travel around the region, describe different soils and meet other students. According to Melanie Earl, “This competition is truly the best way to immerse yourself into this field and gave us the opportunity to learn from professionals and our peers. I couldn’t be prouder of this team. We all put in a lot of hard work, and it really showed.” All of the Aggies learned quickly, performed phenomenally, and represented the University well. The students who participated included:

- Marabelle Burkert '24, Environmental Science & Horticulture dual major from Fleetwood, PA
- Sarah deBeaumont '25, Environmental Science major from Bristol, PA
- Melanie Earl '24, Biology major from Limerick, PA
- Jacob Kwiatkowski '23, Environmental Science major from Hanover Township, PA
- Logan Russell '23, Environmental Science major from Lansdale, PA
- Soleil Sklencar '24, Environmental Science major from Hatboro, PA
- Dan Steinberg '25, Crop Science major from Bethlehem, PA
- Emmy Traband '24, Environmental Science major from Ambler, PA

The team was coached by Dr. Jaclyn Fiola and Steve Dadio. For more information about the soil judging team or to donate, email jaclyn.fiola@delval.edu and follow Dr. Fiola on social media @DelValDigs.



