



# Professor Doug Moffat

## Meeting the Demands of Science – and the Bagpipe

**D**oug Moffat, a professor of science at Middlesex, has always liked a challenge. He relishes the rigors and rewards of science, and encourages his students to put in the hard work his courses in marine biology, environmental science and biology require.

Moffat also enjoys playing that notoriously difficult musical instrument, the bagpipe, that harks back to his Scottish roots. He has become so accomplished at the bagpipe that he performs regularly in parades, concerts and competitions throughout the Northeast as a member of the award-winning Stuart Highland Pipe Band. For the last 10 years Moffat also has played bagpipe at MCC's Commencement exercises, leading the faculty and prospective graduates as they march into the Lowell Memorial Auditorium each spring.

"People seem to either love bagpipes or they hate them," said Moffat, laughing. "It is one of those instruments that can be really frustrating, because you're basically working against your own limitations. They take quite a bit of wind," he said. "So, when you can do it well, it's just a great feeling."

Playing the bagpipe must be in his blood, Moffat admits. There is a town by the name of Moffat in Scotland, a burgh to which he can trace all of his Scottish relatives. Sometimes he wears a kilt of the Moffat tartan, a somber gray and black plaid, when he performs solo. However, as a member of the Stuart Highlanders, a nationally ranked group of 40 pipers and drummers, he usually performs wearing the band's distinctive red Royal Stuart tartan kilt.

Performing solo can be nerve-wracking for any musician, but especially for a bagpipe player, said Moffat. "Bagpipes are challenging to begin with, plus they're very loud, so you're always worried about making a mistake," he said. "Any time I'm playing by myself in front of thousands of people, I get pretty nervous." For the last few years at MCC's Commencement, Moffat has lead a small pipe and drum corps – three pipers and three drummers from the Stuart Highlanders — which takes some of the pressure off. "Commencement was a lot easier on me when all I had to do was show up in my cap and gown and sit in the audience," said Moffat, chuckling. "But, I really enjoy playing at our graduation and am happy to do it."

Moffat earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in biology from Northeastern University. He began playing the bagpipe as a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, where he earned a doctorate in marine ecology. Over the course of

almost 30 years of playing and performing, Moffat has tried to practice daily and estimates he has learned anywhere from 200 to 300 songs.

If playing bagpipe is a family tradition, so is a love of science. Moffat has been a full-time science professor at Middlesex for 15 years, and his wife teaches biology at Weston High School. "When I first came to MCC as an adjunct, the Bedford campus had just opened. It was still under construction and was basically big piles of dirt," said Moffat. When he was hired full-time in 1994, he moved to the Lowell campus and has taught there ever since.

"I really like teaching at Middlesex," said Moffat. "The science and math faculty care a lot about education and their students. I feel I'm part of a team." Moffat also appreciates Middlesex students. "Being a community college, we have open enrollment, meaning everybody is welcome here," he said. "I try to help everybody succeed."

One way Moffat and other MCC science faculty members promote student success is through a National Science Foundation grant-funded program that encourages and supports students preparing for careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics — known collectively as STEM fields. Tutoring, articulation agreements, transfer coordination, stipends, mentoring, advising, job-shadowing, and summer research opportunities are among the special services and programs available to STEM students at Middlesex.

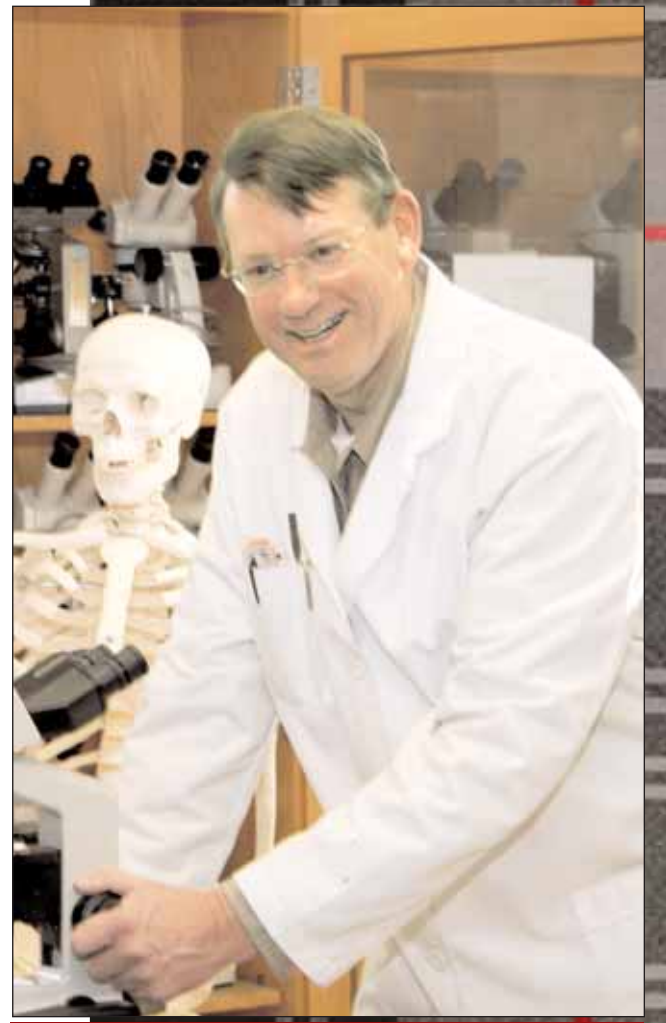
"We are trying to identify students early who are interested in STEM fields and make them feel part of our math and science community," said Moffat. "It's easy to feel lost around all the liberal arts and sciences students." Any help he can give a STEM student is one more step towards helping others meet the challenges of science.

"Science is hard. It also is very rewarding, but it's not easy," said Moffat. "You have to put in a lot of hard work up front. When I see a student who wants to major in a STEM field, it ups my respect for them tremendously, because I know they have chosen to put in the hard work."

- Kathy Register

For more information about STEM programs at Middlesex, visit us online at [www.middlesex.mass.edu/MathSciencesDiv/STEM.htm](http://www.middlesex.mass.edu/MathSciencesDiv/STEM.htm)

For more information about the Stuart Highland Pipe Band, visit: [www.stuarthighlandpipeband.com](http://www.stuarthighlandpipeband.com)



Science Professor Doug Moffat has been teaching full time at Middlesex for 15 years and playing the bagpipe for 30 years.

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Moffat leads the Line of March at MCC's Commencement exercises.