

# Agricultural program to advertise nationally

The College of Agricultural Sciences is attempting to attract more students to its international program.

By Kristin Colella

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Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences will advertise one of its study abroad programs nationwide next month, encouraging students from any university in the country with an agriculture department to apply.

Deanna Behring, the college's international programs director, said the college wants to make the program, which places students in two universities in Russia and Ukraine to study the

regions' agriculture, more competitive by attracting more students from all around the country.

In the past, Penn State has accepted students from select universities, but next month the program will be open to applicants from any university.

The Moscow program currently includes three Penn State students, one student from Montana State, two students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and two students from the University of Florida. There are no students currently enrolled in the Ukraine program because many have postponed their study until next spring due to political turmoil in the country, Behring said.

She added that it is important for students to study in those regions because of their unique approach to agriculture. "For example, in the former Soviet

Union there are so many historic issues with different approaches to agriculture in the communist and new post-communist era," Behring said.

She added that although the college is considering admitting more students to the program, the total number would remain low.

A new Web site and a broadcast center with video clips made by students who have participated in the program are in the works to boost interest for the program.

Behring said the program is unique because American students study with Russian and Ukrainian students in classes taught by American professors, yet have the opportunity to learn Ukrainian or Russian culture and language on the Internet before their visit.

At the University of Florida, Mickie

Swisher, associate professor of sustainable agriculture, said that although she encourages students to study abroad, it is particularly difficult for the university's agriculture students to participate because of their specific degree requirements. "We do collaborate with Penn State on the study abroad program at Moscow," she said. "What we try to set up are programs that generate University of Florida credits...and we have to make sure courses that students are going to take are going to apply to our program."

Christa Joy, study abroad programs director at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said their university already has agriculture students studying abroad in Moscow, and would definitely encourage more students to apply to Penn State's program.

Penn State student Randy Koontz (senior-agriculture and extension education), who studied abroad last year at the Lviv State Agrarian University in Ukraine, said the experience taught him much about the country's unique agriculture.

"The agriculture there is very different," he said. "For example, two average fields here in America would be one huge field in Ukraine, and soil there is the blackest soil in the world... and there are no rocks in the soil."

Koontz added that time spent studying abroad is looked highly upon by the agriculture industry.

"I talked to many employers who are looking for individuals who have had an international experience," he said. "If you've had an international experience, employers will look at you more closely."

## Penn State students socially assess Belize

By Tia Bochnakova

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With limited electricity and unpaved roads, Monkey River Town, Belize, is not the average college student's spring break destination.

But 16 Penn State Students, who journeyed into the remote parts of Central America as a part of the Rural Sociology 497A (Cultural American Field Study) course, were looking for more than a typical vacation spot.

The Belize assessment is part of Penn State's short-term study tours. Students who sign up for the course at the beginning of the semester create their own experiments for the trip.

The students spent eight days in the village of Monkey River, conducting the second set of social assessments for an ongoing project at Penn State.

"We went in to find out how people are using their resources and what their goals are for the future benefit of the community," Project Coordinator Frank Higdon said.

The students were split into three groups: women empowerment, ecotourism and integrative pest management. Each group had a common goal: community improvement.

"These students were able to develop a relationship with a community," Higdon said. "We are trying to focus on what the community is getting by interacting with our students [rather than the other way around]," he said.

Lori Zimmaro (senior-English and Spanish), who participated in the women's empowerment section of the project, said the 16 student participants came from a range of diverse majors.

"It was a chance to interact with people that you wouldn't usually share classes with," she said.

Zimmaro added the women's empowerment group focused on creating a "portrait" of the lives of Monkey River women through interviews and discussion forums. The women discussed their values, roles, concerns and interests in the community. "For the most part, the women there are limited to domestic responsibilities," she said. "We encouraged them to look beyond and take advantage of the opportunities they have outside their village."

Higdon said the ecotourism group worked with the Toledo Institute for Development to access problems within the community that affect the environment and tourism.

The students were able to evaluate

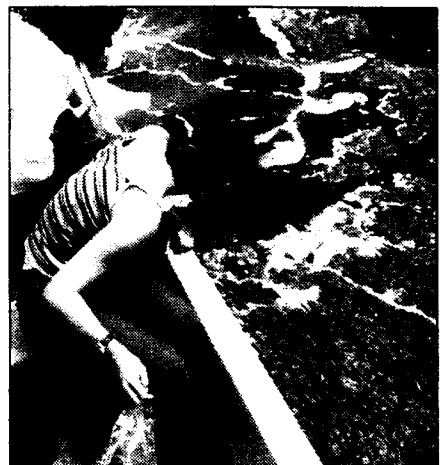


Photo Provided

Kelsha Johnson and Jennifer Dean of IPM examine algae blooms.

"These students were able to develop a relationship with a community."

Frank Higdon  
project coordinator



Photo Provided

A plantation manager talks to the integrated pest management (IPM) group.

these topics were fairly new to me."

The third assessment group, integrated pest management, dealt with problems in chemical pest control in local and commercial farming surrounding the village.

"Since I've been back, there's a lot of hesitation when I go to the grocery store," Jennifer Dean (graduate student-entomology) said.

Dean explains simple things, such as buying bananas, forced her to think about the situation in Monkey River, since the chemicals used in pest control run into the river that is the primary water source for the village.

"The student got a chance to learn that there's more than just them and that they can make a difference in people's lives," Higdon said.

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