



COMMUNITY STUDIES CENTER

FALL/WINTER 2005

Today the Watershed, Tomorrow the World!

By Meghan Klasic '06 and Becki Walker '06

What do dredging for oysters, hypoxic zones, and 15 Dickinson students have in common? They're all part of the Luce Semester, a new watershed-based integrated field semester, which underwent its trial by fire this fall.

In Spring 2004, Candie Wilderman and Michael Heiman of the Environmental Studies Department, and Lauren Imgrund, Director of the Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM), received a sizable grant from the Henry Luce Foundation. This grant money, they decided, would be used to examine and compare environmental issues in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed with

those in the Lower Mississippi Delta. Students who chose to take this integrated four-course experience would receive credit for classes related to aquatic systems, estuarine management, environmental policy, and independent research on a subject of their choice. The research projects, it was hoped, would become more than just papers that would sit on a shelf – ALLARM would put us in touch with watershed organizations, who would explain their research needs at a roundtable dinner at the start of the semester. We were then to choose a project that seemed both academically interesting and useful to the group.

With two 12-passenger vans packed to the brims with bags, coolers, cameras, students and two professors, we headed out on Oct. 30 for what would prove to be the experience of a lifetime.



Sunset on the Mississippi River

Not only would we have an opportunity to produce a valuable project from the experience, we would also have a chance to experience science and social issues hands-on. In addition to two 5-hour lab periods in the field per week, the semester would include two field trips in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, and a three-week sojourn in Louisiana.

Our first trip was to the headwaters of the Susquehanna River in Northeastern Pennsylvania. While kayaking nearly 20 miles in a period of three days, we collected water samples, measuring variables like pH (how acidic or basic the water is), conductivity (the amount of ions dissolved in the water – an indicator of acid rain), and alkalinity (a measure of how much buffering capacity the stream has to resist acid rain.) We truly put science into action on the Susquehanna, charting how acid mine seeps affected different parts of the river as we kayaked along it.

Our second trip was to the Bay itself. We spent two days on Smith Island, population roughly 640, studying a myriad of subjects: oyster diseases, hypoxia (areas of the Bay which lack oxygen due to algal blooms that dis-



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Flat-bottom boat tour of Bayou Sorrel

rupt the natural cycles of the water), and the effect of farming on the Bay's health. Our research was not solely scientific, however; we also met with the community at a potluck dinner and attended the Methodist church, a large force in Island culture. On our way home, we had the privilege of meeting with some of the country's leading scientists at Horn Point Biological Laboratory in Maryland. Here, we listened to the experts themselves discuss sea grass diseases and show us their oyster-growing laboratories. At Assateague National Seashore and Ocean City, Maryland, we compared how these two barrier islands (one left to "migrate," and one completely developed) reacted to environmental pressures.

Upon returning to Carlisle, PA (our base-camp so to speak), our focus in the classroom shifted to the Lower Mississippi River Basin. As we worked through lectures, learning about environmental issues in Louisiana interspersed with cultural tidbits about music and tradition, our profes-

sors feverishly worked to finalize plans for the largest field trip of the semester: the "Louisiana Excursion."

We originally planned to spend a majority of the time stationed in New Orleans, but the arrival of Hurricane Katrina, the breeched levees, and finally, Hurricane Rita, threw everything up in the air. In a few short days, all of the hard work and dedication of our professors over the past year seemed to be slowly slipping away. Yet somehow, they maneuvered housing arrangements and altered plans so we could still make the journey. With two 12-passenger vans packed to the brims with bags, coolers, cameras, students and two professors, we headed out on October 30 for what would prove to be the experience of a lifetime.

For 21 days, we studied everything from mountaintop removal to vanishing wetlands. We spoke with members from the US Army Corps of Engineers, the National Estuary Program, the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, Coal River Mountain Watch, and the Oak Ridge National Laboratory, but even this impressive list does not represent half of the people we were honored to speak with. We attended the Louisiana Environmental Action Network Conference, listened to Big Jack Johnson play at an original juke joint, and toured New Orleans with the famous Wilma Subra; we heard from the "King of the Oysters" (Earl Melancon), the "Queen of the Dead Zone" (Nancy Rabalais), and toured swamps with the Atchafalaya River Basin Keeper, Dean Wilson. The list goes on, but it would not even begin to do the trip justice.

It seems as though we learned more during those 21 days than some people learn in a year of undergraduate study. We had the opportunity to not only learn about these environmental issues, but to actually experience them firsthand. We talked with people who have dedicated their lives to "getting the word out" about the scope of these issues and attempting to educate the public about their importance. Not one of the students in the Luce semester returned from the Louisiana trip unchanged. We left Carlisle on October 30 as undergraduates going through "the ropes," doing what students all over the world do each and every day. We returned to Carlisle on November 19 as young men and women greatly informed about the Lower Mississippi River Basin and the issues and concerns surrounding it, with a greater understanding of how things are handled in the real world.

Throughout college, you read up on various issues, listen to lectures, and even view pictures which attempt to captivate your interest and spark your compassion. Very rarely do you have those same ideas thrown right in your face, forcing you to address them and compelling you to dive into them headfirst. That extra step is exactly what Luce has given us. We have said it time after time, and we will say it again: the Luce semester was the experience of a lifetime, and a lifetime experience.

For more information, contact Candie Wilderman or Michael Heiman. The Luce Semester also has a web site at www.dickinson.edu/departments/envst/lucewebpages/lucehome.htm.

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Remembering Yaounde

By Stephanie Kranes '08

I stood on the balcony of a restaurant in Yaounde with my friend, Tynesha Wright, watching, tasting, hearing and smelling what a city was like so far from our beloved New York. I will never forget that moment. We looked down the street, teeming with people and cars, sun-drenched in the West African summer. Many things looked different in this third-world urban capital: the roads were dusty red and unpaved; the sound of hundreds of different foreign dialects blending into each other at once could be intimidating; there were no traffic lights or many road signs; and due to a bankrupt federal government, accumulated garbage was rotting on every other corner. I do not mean to give the impression that Yaounde was not beautiful, as it is a place where the warmth of the air and the hospitality of the neighborhoods cling to your skin, your hair, your memory. Visions of the sky slowly turning from navy to raven still haunt me, and the way people welcomed me into their homes for food and conversation makes me more optimistic about life. Only when one family invited all of the Crossing Borders students to her home on a day's notice did I recognize the comparative chill of common northeastern American interaction. It was then that I learned how to love the world beyond Greenwich Village.

But what was most distinct about walking down the roads in Yaounde rather than the sidewalks of Manhattan, Queens or Brooklyn, was that



Crossing Borders group in Yaounde, Summer 2005

suddenly and unsuspectingly, I was visible. In New York, no one cares who you are or where you're going—unless you give up your seat on the subway, particularly at rush hour. On my morning walks to the bakery in Yaounde, I began to notice how people would stop what they were doing to watch me. Some smiled and laughed with each other, while others looked at me, bewildered, as I dodged the taxis that couldn't help veering off the narrow road. I felt alone and uncomfortable, detached from the community around me.

This was certainly not Dickinson, where I could walk around campus unconscious of the way others perceived me. My whiteness allowed me to navigate a predominantly white college anonymously; but there, in the brush-green and yellow gutters of that beautiful city, I wanted to scream. I do not blame any of the people for

their reactions. Still, I wondered what kind of emotions they shared as Cameroonian people—what exactly were they thinking when they saw me? I'd never before had to ask myself this question. It was as foreign to me as having to ask our Cameroonian mentor the culturally-correct way to bargain at a Yaounde market. His reaction to my poor bartering skills was like my reaction to the public staring: completely puzzled.

One morning in class, I decided to ask my friend Monaca, a 25-year-old woman studying at the University of Yaounde. I took her words at face value, believing that as a native of the country, she knew what others were thinking. Now, however, I make a habit of reminding myself that I am almost never asked to be the speaker for my entire ethnic background. Looking back, I can relate the experience to my life in a small, liberal arts college in Pennsylvania.

Monaca said that people were surprised to see my face and wanted to

It is a place where the warmth of the air and the hospitality of the neighborhoods cling to your skin, your hair, your memory.

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know what I was doing in Cameroon. There was no animosity in their eyes, but *delight* to see someone so different. *Delight. Surprise. No animosity.* The words affirmed that I carry with me the privilege of having white skin, receiving only a positive reaction to my presence.

I feel like I now have a glimpse into what the first Posse group must have felt their first day at Dickinson, isolated behind a veil of what white kids from white neighborhoods often think about them. According to Monaca, what people in Yaounde thought when they first saw me was all positive: a feeling of excitement, interest and *acceptance*. Cameroonian hospitality—in classes, in people’s homes, when asking for directions, and eating at restaurants, or visiting artist’s shacks and galleries—contrasted sharply with what it means to be ‘Other’ at Dickinson and in the United States. Crossing Borders pried my eyes open to these realities, and now I cannot close them.



Vision, aka Perry Divirgilio, Class of '00

Office of Diversity Initiatives, the Sociology Department and the English Department. This group of spoken word artists has performed all around Philadelphia as well as many places throughout the United States.

“The spoken word series is a close-knit family,” said Damali, part of the duo Quiet Rage that includes Dickinson graduate Perry Divirgilio '00. “We all go to the same places, hang with the same crowd; so we got together.”

Their poetry comes from everywhere and everything: anger, love, humor and popular culture. With poetry dealing with fake hip-hop, representations of women, environmental issues, and even the Darfur region of Sudan, they challenged us to recognize a consciousness most people choose to ignore.

“I’ve written some of the most introspective pieces while studying abroad,” said Collins about his poetic inspiration. “It is always easier to think about home when you are somewhere else.” Throughout the night, he often chose poems that used humor to confront touchy subjects. “It is like a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down,” he said.

“Our goal is to redefine hip-hop and spoken word in the same way Nirvana redefined [rock] music,” said Damali. And according to the artists of the Philly Spoken Soul Poetry Tour, the redefinition will happen through their philosophy of “Love—Peace—Poetry.”

Love, Peace and Poetry

By Ashley Wilson '06

“I am just an instrument. The creator blows through me,” said poet Bernard Collins, Jr. of his spoken word. Fellow poet and host Reuben Jones let the audience know that the five poets of the Philly Spoken Soul Poetry Tour— Collins, Vision, Damali, Rhapsody and Traycee Lynn—were going to take us on an “excursion in artistry and spoken word.”

On November 11, the Philly Spoken Soul Poetry Tour came to Dickinson College in a presentation sponsored by the Community Studies Center, the



Spoken word artist Traycee Lynn

Engaging the World: Summer Field School in Tanzania

By Karen Kirner '08

This past summer, a group of eight students spent six weeks in Tanzania as part of an anthropology course entitled “Ethnographic Field School—Tanzania: Culture, History, Environment and Health in Eastern Africa.” Professors James Ellison and Karen Weinstein designed and organized this trip so that students could learn firsthand about anthropological fieldwork methods and life in Eastern Africa.

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In order to obtain a broad sense of the area, our group traveled to several parts of the country. The trip started in northern Tanzania near Arusha, where we learned about the sometimes difficult intersections of safari tourism and local lives. Our group then traveled to Zanzibar, dividing the week between “Stone Town,” Zanzibar’s historic port city, and a small fishing village called Jambiani on Zanzibar’s eastern coast. From Zanzibar, we traveled to Dar es Salaam for about a week, where we spent most of our time at the University of Dar es Salaam and met with Tanzanian professors and students. For the last three weeks of the field school, we stayed in a small village in the Mbeya Region of southwest Tanzania.

We did not merely learn about an academic subject, but were personally changed in various ways, from our worldview and outlook on life, to our academic aspirations.

During the first three weeks, we attended lectures, participated in discussions and learned field observation



Karen Kirner and Bernadette Jackson talk with a Maasai man

techniques. After garnering knowledge in fieldwork skills and an understanding of the interactions between health, environment and culture, we started to design our own projects. We conducted individual research in the southwest, working with local students as translators. This formed the foundation of the papers we wrote after returning home. Four of us will use this research as the basis for our senior theses in Anthropology.

When reflecting on the trip, we students agree that we learned more than we could have from a book or in a campus classroom. “You never left the classroom,” Anabella Atach ’08 explained. Other students echoed this view, commenting that from waking to sleeping, even when we were not at a lecture or out doing fieldwork for our papers, we were still learning. Joy Bergen ’08 said she learned how to communicate with people; Gabrielle Russo ’06 finally deciphered what those noises in the middle of the night were; Bernadette Jackson ’06 discovered what behavior and conversation topics were culturally acceptable; and Anabella Atach learned how to assimilate and process so many unpredictable events. These students say that they intended to immerse themselves culturally on the trip, but were still a little shocked by how it felt, and what it meant to be constantly learning in and out of the “classroom.” In spite of this overwhelming and



Fieldwork in Rungwe District of Tanzania

challenging task, we recognized that it made our abroad experience extraordinary. Gabrielle Russo said that the trip provided her with academic motivation, giving real meaning to her schoolwork beyond her previous goal of simply working toward a high GPA. She has now discovered what she wants to do in the future. The group agrees that we did not merely learn about an academic subject, but were personally changed in various ways, from our worldview and outlook on life, to our academic aspirations.

Dickinson College tells its students to “engage the world,” and this is exactly what the eight members of the ethnographic field school did.

“The field school is consonant with several of the College’s most important objectives,” said Provost Neil Weissman. “The program engages students in active learning through fieldwork and introduces them to inquiry through research projects. Developing study opportunities outside of Europe, where Dickinson is already well-represented programmati-

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cally, is a high priority for us as well. The Tanzania program is a very helpful complement to our long-standing commitment to Africa through our center in Cameroon.”

We didn't just travel abroad; we immersed ourselves academically and personally in the experience. The innumerable lessons we learned, the endless stories, wonderfully hospitable people and indescribable experiences outweighed the initial fear of traveling to a “developing country.” Through the ethnographic field school, we learned about Tanzania and anthropological fieldwork methods, but we also learned how to engage and participate in a global community.

Louisiana Poet Jerry Ward on Hurricane Katrina

By Mara Waldhorn '06

The devastation of Hurricane Katrina brought the need for a public discourse among the Dickinson community, especially given the school's affiliation with New Orleans institutions Dillard and Xavier Universities



Professor Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

through the Crossing Borders Program. In response to the disaster, the Community Studies Center brought Dillard University Professor Jerry Ward to campus for a one-week visit. He spoke to groups of faculty and students and gave formal lectures that were open to the college and Carlisle communities.

Jerry Ward was born in Washington, DC and attended Tougaloo College, receiving a B.S. in Mathematics. He then studied English at the Illinois Institute of Technology and the University of Virginia. For the past four years, Ward has resided as Distinguished Scholar and Professor of English and African World Studies at Dillard University in New Orleans.

While at Dickinson, Ward spoke with the Crossing Borders class, and held lectures on the works of Richard Wright and the Black Arts Movement. As Katrina took its toll on the New Orleans area, Ward kept a journal, *The Katrina Papers*, which combines poetry and prose to convey his sentiments about the natural disaster. Ward read excerpts from *The Katrina Papers*, diverse in form and content, that touched on the political, social and personal ramifications of the hurricane. It is through his poetry, and the way he personifies Katrina, that the listener is able to connect emotionally with Ward and the effects of the disaster.

In one poem, called *Mother nature, talking to her daughter Katrina*, mother nature asks, “Katrina, what makes your head so hard?” And later: “How can I show my face to society, now that you have shown your ass to the universe?”

After his presentation, the audience

asked Ward about his work and how his life has been affected by the hurricane. Since Katrina, Ward has relocated to Mississippi, leaving his house and the Dillard campus behind. He plans to return to the city in January, where he hopes to rebuild his home and resume his position at Dillard. As of November 1, the University terminated about 59 percent of its faculty. When asked whether he wanted to continue working there, Ward exclaimed, “Dillard can abandon me, but I will not abandon that University!”

Ward and the audience also discussed the rebuilding of New Orleans. Ward seemed saddened by what might potentially become of the shattered city. “Replication of the past is impossible,” he explained, and predicted that New Orleans would be rebuilt with the sole emphasis on tourism and monetary intake. The city will lose the rhythm it once had, he said. New Orleans incorporated a variety of cultures, unique music and cuisine, and Ward now fears it will share the qualities of a sterile, plastic Disney Land. New Orleans wasn't *designed* like DC, he mentioned; it was organic. Now its soul has been suffocated by Katrina and those who wish to capitalize on a new tourist haven.

After living in the city for four months and spending time at Dillard University myself, hearing Ward's vivid poetry and eloquent dialogue about New Orleans took me back to the now devastated city. I was able to envision the vibrant rhythm and aura that the place once had. Though I will never be able to visit New Orleans under the same circumstances, it is reassuring to know that scholars like Ward have recorded their visions of what once was, as well as the effect

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Katrina has had, and what the future holds for the Big Easy.

Profile:

Professor James Ellison

By Kristina Smith '06

Before ethnographer James Ellison attended college, he had never heard of anthropology. He attended a smaller college with only one anthropology professor. After taking an introductory course, Ellison decided anthropology was what he wanted to study in life. "Anthropology offered a vocabulary and analytic perspectives for examining the human condition," Ellison said. He transferred to Michigan State University in order to pursue his new passion, working closely with the African Studies Center at the university.

So began his road to Africa. He combined anthropology with the study of African people and cultures, and pursued a specific interest in East Africa, eventually conducting fieldwork in Tanzania, Somalia and Ethiopia. Ultimately, Ellison earned his PhD in anthropology from the University of Florida.

"It is a challenge to get people to understand the problems in Africa," he said, although their problems do not define them.

As an ethnographer, someone who intensely studies communities, Prof. Ellison truly knows how to engage the world. "An ethnographer immerses him or herself in a place or an issue that involves people," he said. While working on his dissertation in

Tanzania, Ellison lived in a small village and involved himself in village life. "If you end up seating yourself in a few places and doing a lot of work around them and between them, while also traveling out and finding other kinds of networks, you develop very close relationships with people." He speaks Swahili and Nyakyusa, one of Tanzania's 125 unofficial languages. His published works include his research on the influence of the 1918 avian flu epidemic in southwest Tanzania and a study of dance performances as a way of understanding historical and cultural change in society.

After a year and a half at Dickinson as a visiting faculty member from California State University, Ellison joined the Anthropology Department and, recently, the Community Studies Center. "What I like most about Dickinson is the high caliber of student studies and the ethnographic work that goes along with that," he said. Ellison and the Community Studies Center are a natural match. Its philosophies and practices coincide with what he loves to do: fieldwork involving historical ethnography, archival work and oral history. He is enthusiastic about "getting students involved in the fieldwork projects and working with the faculty in different disciplines," and about the center's great network of people. "They are always doing new things," he said, such as the Mosaic and Crossing Borders programs.

Since his arrival at the Community Studies Center, Ellison has been busy. This past summer he co-directed an ethnographic field school in southwest Tanzania. Eight students participated, learning ethnographic methods and focusing on the intersections of culture, history, environment and



Professor James Ellison

health. Next, he plans to take on a fieldwork project with anthropology professor Karen Weinstein, focusing on health and culture in southwest Tanzania. This project will, in due course, link with the field school. This semester Ellison teaches a course on Postcolonial Africa. "It is a challenge to get people to understand the problems in Africa," he said, although their problems do not define them. "It is important in classes and taking students overseas to try to teach through those problems and to get students to learn about people's perspectives and experiences."

UPCOMING EVENT

The Central Pennsylvania Consortium will host the Africana Studies Conference at Dickinson College on April 1, 2006. Scholars and students will explore the topic of "Displacement" in local and global contexts.



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