



Smithsonian-Mason Global Conservation Studies Program

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George Mason University in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution National Zoological Park

<http://mccs.gmu.edu>



Smithsonian
National Zoological Park

A Unique Learning Community

Program courses immerse students into a resident interdisciplinary learning environment focusing on current conservation issues best examined with resources of the Smithsonian, George Mason University and the policy arena of Washington DC. Experts from the Smithsonian and George Mason create robust courses promoting student development as critical thinkers with social awareness and applied capacity to solve conservation related problems. Grounded in natural and physical science, this interdisciplinary semester brings public policy, sociology, conflict resolution, global awareness and mathematics to the learning environment. The program is designed to promote connections between practicing conservationists and students on an international scale. Most courses are based at the Smithsonian Conservation and Research Center (CRC) in Front Royal Virginia.

Smithsonian Mason Semester – Our Flagship Program

Started in 2008, five integrated courses are offered at the upper division undergraduate level during the integrated Smithsonian Mason Semester. The courses represent a comprehensive offering of hands-on learning modules, opportunities for discovery through critical analysis and problem solving, and self and group discovery through writing and presentation. The courses are designed to be taken simultaneously; multiple faculty work in concert to offer the courses seamlessly across disciplinary boundaries. Students are required to reside at CRC in for the Semester allowing immersion in a conservation community for both formal and informal education.

Graduate and Professional Development Courses – Graduate Certificates

A variety of courses ranging from Effective Leadership for Environmental Management to Habitat Restoration and Monitoring are offered as intensive two week courses. These courses attract international students and graduate students, providing continued development of a global community of conservation practitioners. These courses are offered at CRC and around the world, taking full advantage of the Smithsonian's vast international network.

"I have benefited so much from the connection between the classroom and the real world, the integration of multiple aspects of conservation, and the complex ideas we have had to think about."

"I definitely feel more equipped to find solutions to problems, and I feel that we have been provided with many tools and examples of how to approach various problems."

Student Assessment of Learning Gains



The Experience of a Lifetime

Students and faculty reside in one of the world's premier conservation and research facilities, the Smithsonian National Zoo's Conservation and Research Center. A central hub of international conservation, CRC is located near George Mason University and Washington D.C. The Smithsonian Mason partnership includes SI researchers, Mason faculty, visiting faculty, international visitors, conservation practitioners and graduate and undergraduate students. It is situated among some of the world's most endangered animals on 3000 acres adjoining Shenandoah National Park. Flexibility in the learning community schedule accommodates opportunities to attend congressional sessions, visit non-government organizations and to network with the active conservation community. All of these features contribute to a unique learning environment inspiring development of conservation responsibility and practice for a lifetime.



Meeting the Demands of Science Education Reform

Development of the Partnership was facilitated by Dept of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education Funding (FIPSE) and National Science Foundation funded SENCER and Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL). Utilizing expertise of practicing conservation biologists from academics, government and non-government organizations we re-evaluated the needs of Conservation Studies as an interdisciplinary endeavor, and the educational approach needed to improve undergraduate education. Courses taught through the Partnership reflect pedagogical science education reform now called for by the National Academies of Science and the National Science Foundation. *The Partnership is a model for national and international reform of science education through conservation in practice.*

Active learning, teamwork and organizational skills, information technology, public communication through writing and presentation and case studies are common themes to these learning environments. The network of students, faculty and conservation practitioners is an important component of this experience. Students discover new opportunities through the variety of institutional partners involved with the Smithsonian Institution and George Mason University. Students are finding tremendous opportunities for internships, graduate study and careers in government and non-government organizations. Faculty discover new opportunities for teaching, research and collaboration empowering individuals to consult on real-world conservation problems with private, public and global players. *These features exemplify SENCER's themes of innovative teaching, professional responsibility and civic engagement.*

Future Directions

In September of 2008 the Smithsonian Regents and George Mason Board of Regents created an alliance to build on many years of collaboration in education and research. The alliance has designed and will co-fund a new state of the art education facility at CRC to simultaneously accommodate up to 120 professional, graduate and undergraduate students.

The Smithsonian Mason Semester was cited as one of the innovations that led US News and World Report to rank Mason as the top University to watch in 2009.

<http://gazette.gmu.edu/articles/12396>

