Environmental Studies Students Help Restore Park

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ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES STUDENTS HELP RESTORE PARK

Professor Robert De Haan’s Restoration Ecology class is the capstone course for environmental studies majors. The course ends with a real-world environmental restoration project.

De Haan’s goal for the project is “to restore the structure and function of remnant ecosystems to their original state through the removal of invasive species, to reintroduce natural disturbances, and to increase the number of education programs and opportunities for recreation in the park.”

This year, the class chose Buena Vista County Conservation Park, near Peterson, Iowa. Once beautiful, with streams, prairie, woodland, and savannah, the park had lately fallen into disrepair. So, its new conservation board director, who has a background in ecosystem restoration, asked the class to consider his park for its project.

“He was so enthusiastic about it,” says senior Nathan Struyk. “We knew that he would actually use our plan.”

Work on the project began in February. The students made many trips to the park, sometimes leaving as early as 6:30 in the morning. They hiked the trails, collecting GPS points, compiling species lists, and taking water samples.

Neil Brouwer, who is now a senior, took the GPS data and created the first-ever trail map of the 309-acre park. Students in the class also mapped out all habitat types in the park to illustrate the different ecosystems and how best to care for them.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the project, students agreed it was putting their learning into practice.

“It was amazing to get out into wild, semi-untouched areas,” says junior Katie Eschelman. “I learned about relying on others and how to work together as a team.”

Dylan Bartels, who graduated this spring, says the project gave him a chance to use skills and knowledge he’s acquired in a variety of courses at Dordt. “I enjoyed putting my knowledge into action and developing skills I can use in the future. It’s important for people to go out and engage God’s creation. Hopefully the maps will help people do that.”

“The whole process was rewarding,” says junior Jordan Peters. “We were nervous, but giving the presentation to the conservation board and seeing their excitement for the park—was an awesome experience.”

KATE HENRECKSON

Dordt environmental studies majors sit down with members of a park conservation board to put their learning into practice. The group helped plan a restoration project as part of their major’s capstone course.

Campus Kudos

Dordt College senior Jenna Veenstra has been awarded a Goldwater Honorable Mention by the Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation. Veenstra, from Cedar Falls, Iowa, is the first Dordt student to receive this honor and one of only two Iowa students to receive the award.

Dordt College ranked second in Christian Universities Online (CUO) 25 Most Beautiful Colleges and Universities in the Midwest 2017.

A $10,000 grant from the Pittsburgh Conference on Analytical Chemistry and Applied Spectroscopy, Inc., will help fund a $25,000 Shimadzu GC2014 gas chromatograph. The chromatograph will allow introductory and intermediate chemistry students to be more actively engaged in chemical processes and give them tools and techniques they can use as future scientists.

Dordt College construction management majors took first place in the John Brown University 6th Annual Disaster Shelter Design Competition, sponsored by Samaritan’s Purse International Relief, in April. The competition provides students with an opportunity to create practical solutions to real problems—like the current refugee crisis. This is the second time in three years that Dordt has taken first place in the overall competition.

Digital Media Production Professor Mark Volkers and four Dordt students won a 2017 gold Hermes Creative Award for their film Balisna: The Shepherds of Lesotho, which tells the story of unreached shepherds living in the mountains of Lesotho in South Africa.

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