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The Center for Global Field Study: Training environmental stewards worldwide

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When Lauren Jorelle was a UW student, she went to Indonesia as part of a field study program sponsored by the Washington National Primate Research Center and the Department of Psychology. The experience was a good one — so good that she elected to go back on her own to do further research through the Indonesian university the UW collaborates with.

"It's something I never would have done if I hadn't participated in the organized field study program," Jorelle said. "I wouldn't have dreamed of living in the jungle for a couple of months essentially on my own, with a guide. In fact, if I hadn't been in the program, I wouldn't have even known it was a possibility."

Jorelle's experience was facilitated by Randy Kyes, research professor in psychology and head of the Division of International Programs at the primate center. Jorelle later became the division coordinator of international programs at the center, and is currently serving as a part time administrator for Kyes' latest venture — The Center for Global Field Study.

With the center, Kyes hopes to expand the programs that made Jorelle's adventure possible. He's been conducting collaborative field training programs in Indonesia since 1991, and over time has added programs in Thailand, Bangladesh, China, India, Nepal, D.R. Congo, Brazil and Mexico. It all started with his own research.

Back in 1990, Kyes was in Indonesia doing a population survey of some monkeys on a remote island, and his Indonesian colleagues at Bogor Agricultural University said, "We would like to learn more about these survey techniques and especially about primate behavior. When you come back next year, could you do a short field course for our students?"

Kyes agreed, and conducted that first course exclusively for Indonesian students. "I've always enjoyed teaching and



Randy Kyes, left, instructs UW student Elliot Smith during a field exercise on Tinjil Island, Indonesia as part of the International Field Study Program-Indonesia.



Randy Kyes, second from right, conducts a field training exercise with Nepali students in Langtang National Park in the Nepali Himalayas.

working with students," he said. "I probably got more out of it than they did. But they were very enthusiastic, and asked if we could do it again the next year. And I certainly was happy to accommodate that."

The program became annual, and by 1995, UW students were joining the Indonesian ones in the field study program, officially known as the International Field Study Program-Indonesia. That enabled both groups to not only learn about the environment, but also have an opportunity for cultural exchange. More than 60 UW students have been through the program since then.

Meanwhile, Kyes' colleagues — both at the primate center and at universities in other countries — heard about what he was doing and thought that it could be replicated elsewhere. He's been doing annual field training programs with partner institutions in a number of countries since then.

All the programs have been in conservation biology. "Ultimately, all of this is to benefit the conservation of these environments," Kyes said. "Many of the places where we conduct our training programs are in impoverished countries and they are suffering greatly in terms of the loss of biodiversity. So there is a critical bottom line here, an ethical responsibility if you will — to train the local people so they can become the experts and manage their own wildlife and their own environment."

Given that the collaborative programs originated through the primate center, they have focused on primates. But Kyes wanted to take the next step and expand into general environmental issues as well as into global health.

"We're now beginning to focus heavily on the interface between the environment and human health," he said.

That's why, a year ago, he began the process of setting up the Center for Global Field Study, which is jointly affiliated with the Office of Global Affairs, the Department of Psychology and the Washington National Primate Research Center. The center's official mission statement is "to facilitate and provide field-based educational, research and outreach opportunities for students and professionals from the University of Washington and partnering institutions around the world in areas relating to global health and the environment."

The center now has an office on the first floor of Gerberding and an advisory board that represents many constituencies on all three campuses of the UW.

"To have this as an umbrella entity will allow us to develop partnerships in more countries," Kyes said. "We'll be able to have established programs in many different countries that will allow students or other researchers an opportunity to go to a place where there's already an established collaboration. This provides the necessary infrastructure to help facilitate training, research and outreach opportunities for students."

But Kyes also has much bigger ideas in mind. "One of the projects we're thinking of right now which would fall under the center would be a program known as Scholars of the Environment," he said. "As I've mentioned, we currently have collaborative programs in a number of countries where my foreign collaborators and I teach field courses on an annual basis. What I'd like to do is take two or three of the top participants in, say, Indonesia, and during the year have them join in field courses in three other countries that are ongoing — to Mexico, China, and Nepal, for example. Then have two or three top participants from a field course in Nepal go to the DR Congo, Bangladesh, and Brazil. So, slowly over time, what you're doing is building a network of future leaders of the environment, having them learn the successes and failures of another country and also be receiving the same core curriculum that allows them to talk to others around the world."

That's a pretty big dream, but Kyes is already partway there. He says that students from his first field course back in 1991 are now moving into positions of authority where they can implement policies and make a difference.

"You'll never have a successful conservation program unless the local people can take a leading role in the management of the program," he said. "You can throw all the money you want into a country, and as soon as the money dries up and the foreigners leave, it's right back to business as usual. It's a long-term commitment. So my ultimate goal is to help educate and train as many future leaders around the world as I can, get them excited about conservation and encourage them to make a career of that."

The center is currently operating with support from the Office of Global Affairs and related small grants, including support from the Woodland Park Zoo for the global field training programs. Kyes is also in the process of applying for more substantial grant funding to support the center's growth.

He says he and Jorelle are happy to talk to students, faculty and staff who are interested in field study programs or who would like to partner with the center. They can be reached at cgfs@u.washington.edu.