Government Shutdown Interferes with Course Agenda

This winter season was marked by the longest government shutdown in U.S history totaling 35 days. The shutdown spanned from December 22 to January 25 during which 380,000 government employees, considered non-essential, were furloughed or given leave from their jobs while 420,000 others continued to work, but without pay (Desjardins and Frazee, 2019). Being on a college campus often creates a physical and social bubble of academia in which non-academic events in political arenas, government agencies, and community spaces seem distant. For some, this incident passed with little disruption or even detectable presence. But as was the case within the Allegheny ES department, many citizens experienced significant effects from this shutdown which consequently had rippling effects on other organizations and individuals. ES Professors Rich Bowden and Casey Bradshaw-Wilson shared the difficulties that the shutdown had imposed on his work.

Due to the shutdown, the majority of national facilities were also closed including the Erie National Wildlife Refuge (ENWR) and Rocky National Park, both of which Professor Bowden was intending to visit as experiential sites for his classes. Specifically, he had intended to base his FS 201 course on the work being done at ENWR and had to replan his entire curriculum around a different topic. Professor Bradshaw-Wilson also attested to these difficulties as the Erie Refuge trips that she had planned for her conservation biology course had to be postponed. As for the Rocky National Park, it is the destination site Professor Bowden’s EL Seminar. Although it is now open and available for visiting, the shutdown prevented some necessary communication from taking place in the planning process. Professor Bowden’s private research was also affected. The associate editor for his research paper is employed by the forest service and was consequently furloughed during the shutdown period which delayed his work. It is not only in academia that Professor Bowden has witnessed the impacts of the shutdown. One of his students reached out to him regarding their inability to cover tuition that semester due to their parent’s temporary lack of income as a result of the shutdown. Stories like this opened my eyes to the wide ranging impacts that a government shutdown can have on both institutional and individual levels. While many of us have the good fortune to only hear about in the news, for many there are real financial, vocational, and educational consequences that often offer no immediate recovery.

The Allegheny College Environmental Science and Sustainability department is currently holding the annual sticker design contest. Submissions should be sent to <rdunton@allegheny.edu> by March 15th
Costa Rica - A Study Abroad Experience

In late August 2018, Allegheny Junior Chlöe Finger left the country for the first time to spend her fall semester immersed in the clouds in Monteverde, Costa Rica. “Everything was green and beautiful, blooming,” Chlöe said, recalling her 3 months abroad. While the rest of us were suffering the slow descent into a northwest PA winter, Chlöe was experiencing a “continuation of summer.” Rather than a change from warm to cold, Costa Rica’s winter season is marked by a transition from dry to wet, meaning that her days there were characterized by consistent rains. “It was more rain than I’ve ever seen in my entire life. It was beautiful. Everything was lush.”

Through this rain, Chlöe and her 15 classmates traveled by bus all the way up and down both coasts of the country for class field trips. The trips passed through many different elevations and microclimates, and every single place they visited was different. At each stop, the class was tasked with learning the scientific names and ecological details of 70 different species, giving Chlöe “an incredible breadth of knowledge” about native plants, animals, and all the ways they interact.

The program was CIEE’s Tropical Ecology and Conservation, which is one of two Allegheny-sponsored study abroad programs in Costa Rica. Research and hands-on fieldwork were key components of the experience, and for the final month, each student designed and pursued their own research project, while on a home-stay with a local family. Chlöe’s research studied leaf-cutter ants, and whether they preferentially cut tree leaves based on the path they plan on taking back to their nest. For instance, if they were planning on going uphill, would they cut smaller leaves than if they were taking a downhill path? This was determined by weighing thousands of individual leaf-cutter ants and their leaves, a very meticulous and time-consuming task that involved using foil to temporarily enclose the ants in little living burritos to more easily take their measurements. The answer Chlöe found from her study, which is the first of its kind to be conducted in the wild, is that the ants do cut their leaves preferentially! And, because the study is unprecedented, her work is set to be published. “Honestly, 0% ever thought that would happen,” Chlöe says, “but here I am, and it's happening.”

Life abroad granted Chlöe many firsts, from new fruits to a new language to hundreds of new animals. One of the most meaningful animal encounters she was gifted was the sight of a red-eyed tree frog in the wild. “I had this thing about tree frogs as a kid, they were like one of my favorite animals,” she explained. “So anyway, I went to Costa Rica, I found a red-eyed tree frog, I held it in my hand, and I was like, ‘this represents so much of my childhood’. It was amazing.” Though she missed her Allegheny community while she was away, Chlöe says, “It’s important to travel because there is no substitute for real life experiences. It’s important to live in new and different places, because perspective is everything and your perspective will always be broadened when you travel. That's the beauty of it.” This beauty will likely remain with Chlöe for a long time, with memories of the tropics to keep her warm as spring slowly approaches.

Students interested in studying abroad are encouraged to schedule an appointment with the International Education Office to explore their department’s options.

Editor: Brittany Lutheran ‘19
Warren Washington wins ‘Nobel Prize For The Environment’

The Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement is often referred to as the ‘Nobel Prize for the Environment’ as there is no Nobel Prize for the Environment. The annual winner receives a cash prize of $200,000. Warren Washington started his academic career at Oregon State University where he studied physics then received his PhD at the Pennsylvania State University in meteorology. Washington works with climate modeling and their use on parallel supercomputing architectures. In 2010, Washington was awarded the National Medal of Science by President Obama, and most recently won the 2019 Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement. Washington is a part of a small group of people of color that have won the award since it was founded in 1974. He won the award alongside Michael E. Mann, another PSU graduate, who is a disguised professor of atmospheric science at Penn State.

More information can be found on huffingtonpost.com under the article title of Pioneering Black Scientist Wins ‘Nobel Prize For The Environment’ by Marlene Cimons.

Internship and Research Opportunities

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) | Due 3/19 | Contact RA-DCNRInterns@pa.gov for more information
WNY PRISM Invasive Species Management Assistant — Buffalo, NY | Due 3/8 | Go to www.wnyprism.org for more information
Costal Marine Education and Research Academy (CMERA) — Clearwater, FL | Due 3/31 | Go to www.cmera.net to apply
Farm Link Montana | Go to www.farmlinkmontana.org for more information and to apply

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