Welcome Visiting Professor Pearce

Kelly Pearce is one of multiple visiting professors teaching at Allegheny this year. This fall, she is teaching one section of ES 110 with Ian Carbone and is hoping to kickstart some new research in French Creek. Professor Pearce studied mesopredators, such as otters and skunks, for her graduate degree and PhD work. She is interested in the way those carnivores are viewed by humans, and animals’ potential as flagship species for conservation.

Professor Pearce has a career path that I think many students in the ES Department can readily relate to. She grew up spending a lot of time outdoors and knew she wanted to somehow work with the environment. She was eventually exposed to environmental science as a career possibility through a freshman ES course at Juniata College. However, Kelly Pearce did not know exactly what specific discipline inside ES to pursue. Through trying many different areas of environmental science and all opportunities, she eventually found that she connected with wildlife and specifically wanted to focus on mesopredators. To this day her career has been focused around those carnivores.

When interviewing Professor Pearce, I really connected with her story, because in a lot of ways it mirrors my own. I believe many of us in the ES department found our way here because of a deep connection to nature, although what we individually value within that varies. While we may not know exactly which aspect of the environment we personally want focus on, Professor Pearce’s story is a shining example that we all can find our niche. Her interests in environmental science are also perfect for Allegheny, as they meld sociology and wildlife biology together to study the human dimensions of the mesopredators: a certified unusual combination. I had a great time talking with Professor Pearce, and I hope that everyone can get know her and look forward to her contributions to our department.

Upcoming Talk

*Active Forest Management: A Tool for Conservation & Ecosystem Health*: Guy Dunkle and Annie Socci. September 13th, 6:30pm, Voodoo Meadville.
Allegheny in Delaware - A Summer Emersion

When Ewan Malenfant, a class of 2020 Environmental Science major and Physics/Astronomy double minor, got a summer job at the Delaware National Estuary Reserve (DNER), he expected it would be interesting work with just one or two chances to help out in the field. And while he did gain skills in completing “nitty-gritty office work,” operating in a professional environment, and working long hours at the office (sometimes coming back to work at 10 pm and not leaving until 2 the next morning), Ewan ended up assisting his co-workers in nearly every project the reserve undertook.

One of the largest projects he worked on included setting up 53 birdboxes for migrating bluebirds and tree swallows, at risk from disadvantageous house sparrows that push out other songbirds and overtake the nests. These birdboxes featured “sparrow spookers,” self-designed mechanisms meant to scare the sparrows away. While the spookers were not as successful as hoped, the sparrows were still bested as Ewan took a portion of their eggs and refrigerated them for 24 hours at a time to limit the number of newly-hatched birds. In addition to the house sparrow project, Ewan also took sediment cores in search of blue carbon, carbon absorbed by the ocean in coastal environments, did marsh bird and horseshoe crab surveys, stayed on the lookout for endangered species, and surveyed for the invasive parrot’s feather plant. Ewan and his co-workers were also the first people in the world to use biochar as a soil amendment in a tidal marsh, which was not an easy job as it often entailed wearing waders in 90-degree heat and trudging through the marsh.

Ewan found the job through Delaware’s state parks website, and ended up working alongside an Allegheny alumn, Nicole Rodi ’13. Ewan says his experiences at Allegheny thus far helped him to be “more than prepared” for the work he did over the summer. This was especially notable when he had to present his projects and was completely relaxed and confident after having so much practice in professional communication thanks to class assignments at Allegheny.

For students interested in pursuing similar work, Ewan has one main message: “Don’t be afraid to get muddy.” On a broader note, he encourages future scientists, field researchers, and people in general to “dive into opportunities, get the most out of them, do as much as you can, and try to have fun while learning what you’re passionate about.” While Ewan may be passionate about a lot of things - birds, environmental science as a whole, tennis, recreational ping-pong - he certainly found an opportunity that allowed him to explore an amazing variety of potential interests and left him with a wide breadth of skills to apply towards his bright future.
Allegheny Environmental Science Professors Win Big

At college, it is not only students who face the wonder and uncertainty of new experiences. Here at Allegheny, professors are highly engaged in team presentations, writing, research, and life-long learning. Our very own Eric Pallant, Beth Choate, and Benjamin Haywood recently applied to and participated in the 4th World Symposium of Sustainable Development at Universities, hosted at the University of Science in Penang, Malaysia. Specifically, this conference sought to learn about and acknowledge how different schools around the world are actively incorporating the sustainable development goals in their course content, the campus, and surrounding communities.

The application process first consisted of writing a group paper and submitting it to the conference committee for evaluation. The three professors worked diligently over the spring semester collaborating on the paper with what little time they had between classes, department meetings, office hours, and time at home. Once accepted to the conference, Professors Pallant, Choate, and Haywood crafted a presentation before making the 38 hour trip to Malaysia to share ideas with other global academics.

It was on the unique and welcoming island community of Penang that they encountered Chinese, Indian, Malay, and Arabic cultures. Both Professor Pallant and Professor Choate expressed how inspired they were by the harmonious sense of community that they saw between people of so many different cultures and religions. Our professors experienced even more of a welcome than they expected on the first night of the trip, when their hosts insisted that they dance before the other conference members. Their trip was certainly not all work and no play.

Professor Choate shared that one of favorite adventures was her mission of locating a woven ball, originating from the Malaysian sport Sepak Takraw, as a gift for her son. Professor Pallant expressed his wonder and awe of visiting a tropical fruit farm with over 250 varieties of fruit! According to both Professors, charcoal tofu is an unsuspectingly delicious meal that all who visit Malaysia should try.

As their time at the conference came to a close, Professor Choate, Pallant, and Haywood were able to see their hard work pay off in their reception of the “Best Paper Award.” If this prestigious honor wasn’t enough, our professors also brought the gift of new ideas and inspiration with them upon their return to Allegheny. In reflecting on the conference, both Professor Choate and Professor Pallant stated how this trip offered a chance to begin an academic and cultural relationship with the Malaysian community which they hope to cultivate through potential study abroad opportunities for students. Professor Pallant also expressed his appreciation that so many universities around the world are teaching sustainable development to future generations.

Whether we as students realize it or not, our professors still prepare for presentations, edit papers, and adapt to experiences of traveling abroad. This trip hopefully offers the lesson that even deep into adulthood, the learning and exploration never stops.