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ECOLOGY PROJECT
INTERNATIONAL

Ecology Project International Press Kit

Ecology Project International (EPI) is a non-profit organization based in Missoula, Montana dedicated to developing place-based, ecological education partnerships between local experts and high school students to address critical conservation issues. EPI engages US students as well as youth in Costa Rica, Mexico, the Galapagos Islands and the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem in conservation as they learn about and help protect threatened species and habitats. Our research projects are carefully selected to provide a local focus with global ramifications.

Ecology Project International (EPI) improves and inspires science education and conservation efforts worldwide through field-based student-scientist partnerships. Our vision is to create an ecologically literate society where the world's youth are empowered to take an active role in conservation.

Fact Sheet:

Since EPI's first field season in 2000, nearly 5000 students have participated in our field programs, including nearly 2,800 students and teachers from Costa Rican, Ecuadorian, and Mexican schools. Local students comprise approximately two-thirds of our total participants. We focus on conservation hot spots where students work alongside scientists to learn about and help protect threatened species and habitats.

Founders:

Scott Pankratz — Executive Director, founder

Scott is an educator and wilderness guide with diverse field and classroom experience. The genesis of EPI was



Scott's Masters thesis at the University of Montana. Scott's strengths lie in integrating research and education, bringing common vision to a range of stakeholders, and non-profit administration. Prior to EPI, Scott taught high school physics and biology at Beacon High School in Oakland, CA and led mountain and whitewater trips for the National Outdoor Leadership School. When not teaching, Scott likes to spend his time backpacking and kayaking.

M.S. University of Montana, Environmental Studies Program, 2000

B.A. University of California at Santa Barbara, Environmental Studies, 1993

Julie Osborn — Advancement Director, founder

Julie is an ecologist focused on global change and conservation. With EPI, Julie facilitates collaboration between scientists and the communities near their research sites to promote effective conservation. She also directs



fundraising and organizational development. Previously, Julie was a Principal Research Associate at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab and a Research Assistant at the Carnegie Institute of Washington DC. She first visited Costa Rica as an undergraduate as part of a tropical biology field semester in Monteverde. When not in the office (or in the field), Julie practices yoga, hikes mountains, and runs rivers.

M.S. Stanford University, Biological Sciences, 1997

B.A. University of California at Santa Barbara, Environmental Studies and Ecology & Evolution, 1992

Ecology Project International Programs :

EPI involves student groups, individuals, and families in authentic field research that catalyzes conservation, science education and intercultural exchange. Our programs engage local residents and international students in field research, inspire learning about science, culture, and communication, and empower citizens to engage in the world around them to make a difference.



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Costa Rica:

EPI partners with the Pacuare Nature Reserve in Costa Rica- the 4th most important nesting site in the world for the critically endangered Leatherback turtle. An estimated 90% of Leatherback eggs were illegally harvested at Pacuare before the student/researcher turtle patrols. Today, only 10% of the eggs are taken and the vital data that are gathered fuel global efforts to save this living dinosaur. Every night of the Leatherback nesting season, Ecology Project International students walk the beach in search of sea turtles and their nests, to

study population trends and protect the nests from poachers and other threats.

“Being there with the turtles, seeing them, and working to protect them was the first time that I have ever felt I was truly doing something that mattered, something that would make a difference. I am going to do this for the rest of my life.”

-Hazel Sanchez Murillo, Costa Rica Participant

Galapagos Islands:

EPI travels to the Galapagos Islands, the first world heritage site, where although 97% of the islands are protected National Park, this protection does not mean that this renowned archipelago and the species that inhabit it are safe. Encroaching development and the introduction of nonnative species is driving numerous species extinct. More than 30,000 people live in the remaining 3% of the unprotected land and the population is growing. As EPI students collect data on giant tortoises, help remove invasive plants, and restore critical habitat needed by native and endemic species, they help ensure future survival of the giant tortoise in these remote and beautiful islands.



“EPI’s collaboration in both the student and Galapagos community is very valuable, because it motivates us to take care of our ecosystems and at the same time protect nature, flora and fauna. As an EPI student I would like to say that the project educates the community through example.”

-Mario Janai Yépez, Galapagos Island Participant

Sea of Cortez, Baja Mexico

Thirty-nine percent of the world’s marine mammals can be found in the Sea of Cortez. The rich waters are a critical feeding area for cetaceans, and other spectacular marine life. A hundred years ago the great whales–Finback, Blue and Humpback–were nearly hunted to extinction. Today, all three species thrive in the Sea of Cortez. The research data collected by scientists and EPI students is being used to create a protected area for whales in the Sea of Cortez. Scientists in Mexico use Ecology Project International Island Ecology Program students’ work to improve conservation efforts in Baja California Sur. While exploring and learning about the desert and marine environments, students collect much needed data about the human impacts on these sensitive sites.



“Studying these mammals (the whales) has been very important for me. I now understand and am able to communicate the importance of the ecology that surrounds us. This course has been the best classroom of my life.”

-Ineda Ariana Peralta Roch- Mexico Participant

The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem



One of the few remaining islands of North American pristine wilderness, Yellowstone is home to grizzly bears, wolves, mountain lion, elk, big horn sheep, bald eagles, lynx, wolverine and the only free-ranging natural herd of bison in the lower 48 states. EPI's student-scientist partnership is leading to a greater understanding about the impact of predator populations of grizzly, lynx, and fisher in the last intact predatory-prey systems in the continental U.S. through youth involvement in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Local scientists and

landowners use Ecology Project International students' work to improve conservation efforts in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. As students explore this wild-land/urban interface, they gather information and techniques to better protect it for the future.



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"The most important concept I learned is that nothing is as simple as it seems—everything is connected."

-Kiera McNelis Yellowstone Participant

Press Releases :


saving planet earth

The BBC Wildlife Fund awards Missoula-headquartered Ecology Project International a 20,000-pound grant for the organization's Galápagos Program.

March 18, 2008

For many the Galápagos Islands conjure images of the world's most diverse, unspoiled habitat, an almost magical microcosm of biology where Charles Darwin developed the Theory of Evolution. The Galápagos Islands are a 4,897 square-mile archipelago in the Pacific Ocean, officially a province of Ecuador. While they boast 97% dedicated National Park land, there is another 3% of landmass in the Galápagos Islands that most people don't think about. This is where more than 30,000 people live and work, and that population is growing.

So how does an island grouping that straddles the equator relate to Missoula, Montana? The link is Ecology Project International.

Ecology Project International (EPI) began as the thesis of its founder and director, Scott Pankratz. After receiving his Masters in Environmental

Studies at The University of Montana, Pankratz realized that his idea of partnering scientists with local and international students in some of the world's most ecologically fragile environments could be put into action.

"Many environmental issues are global, but they've always got critical local components. We work to educate local students about their own environment through involving them in hands-on conservation research. We also involve international students who work on the same projects, and meet their local peers. The collaboration brings home the global component and is very inspiring. But the educational priority is on those people who live closest, as they will have the most impact on their own environment. Through our educational efforts, we believe that impact can be positive," says Pankratz.

Today, EPI programs exist on Mexico's Baja California Peninsula, in Costa Rica, the Galápagos Islands, and Montana's Yellowstone National Park. The organization is in its eighth year and since 2003, EPI has led field seasons in the Galápagos Islands.

Near the end of last year, EPI's Galapagos program received a 20,000-pound (equivalent to 40,000 U.S. dollars) grant from the BBC's Wildlife Fund, a grant-giving charity that distributes a percentage of the BBC's profits to help support projects protecting the world's endangered wildlife. EPI's student program

was featured in part of the BBC 'Saving Planet Earth' series in 2007.

Joshua Klaus, the Manager of Academic Programs, headed down to the Islands on February 28 to ready the facilities for the 2008 season, which starts March 16. Klaus started with the program in August of 2004. This year the program seeks to strengthen their partnership with the Galápagos National Park, to implement leadership curriculum with local students, to investigate new programming options, and to raise funds in the Galápagos business community to support local student participation.

Heading into his fourth field season, Klaus postulates on how the BBC grant will help the program meet some of its objectives. "There are difficulties associated with running a field program in a fairly remote location. There is limited access to communication and transportation," says Klaus. "The grant will improve our infrastructure with dedicated office space, added printers and scanners. It will make the life of our local coordinator much easier." EPI also hopes to expand staffing in the Islands and in Missoula prior to the next season.

Another objective this year is to foster leadership through a pilot program that identifies local students with leadership potential and teaches them how to build on those skills within their community. The BBC grant will help fund that effort.

Bringing a greater understanding to environmental challenges faced in the Galápagos Islands is yet another objective of EPI's program. Because most of the Galápagos Islands are protected by Ecuador's National Parks system, there is a perception that this is perhaps one of the last places that requires major conservation efforts. Perception, however, may be one of the greatest threats to the Islands. Encroaching development, and the introduction of non-native species by increased tourist traffic, human relocation, and cargo shipped to the Islands pose a threat to this delicate ecosystem.

"There is population pressure coming from continental Ecuador and a history of extractive practices – mostly fishing – in the region," says Klaus.

"The migratory population and the requirement of local subsistence can come into conflict with conservation efforts."



Klaus says growth is notable in terms of developments, homes and other new construction. "I recently heard that construction is now the number one industry on the Galápagos Islands," says Klaus. "There is more of a sense of urgency in terms of trends. Right now is a critical time to educate local and international groups, to provide tools, to preserve some sort of future for this place, both socially and ecologically."

International groups include tourists who are able to visit the islands. Most don't realize that there is a local population living a contemporary lifestyle outside of the Park. "Outsiders often neglect the human side of the Islands," says Klaus.

The Galápagos program's students range in age from 15 to 18, are both Galapagoan and American, and are generally recommended by their teachers or school counselors. Klaus has seen varying degrees of "breakthrough" moments with the students over the years. "The kids from the U.S. experience those moments of awe almost on a daily basis because the environment is so new to them. For the Galapagoan kids, it's a bit more challenging. This is their home," says Klaus. "The breakthrough happens though when they recognize their potential power to positively affect the future of their home."

As for the impact of EPI's Galápagos program, Klaus notes a Galapagoan girl from his first season who has kept in touch with the program and is now a marine biologist. "We hope to continue to inspire learning and action in all of our students," says Klaus.





Saving the Big Blues



UF group among first U.S. students in international whale research study

For some, a week at the beach means relaxing by the water during the day and enjoying a nice dinner at a full-service resort in the evening. For others, it means waking up at the crack of dawn, skipping a morning shower, loading a small but functional research vessel, looking for large mammals and sleeping in tents on a deserted island – with a possible visit from scorpions and rattlesnakes.

It may sound like a crash course in survival, but in February 2007, seven UF students were the first student group from the United States to take part in an international blue whale research study, working under the direction of world-renowned whale researcher Jorge Urban, Ph.D., on the Sea of Cortez.

Students on the trip included biology alumna Tonya Keiffer '06; graduate student Brian Labuhn; May 2007 graduates Bretta Bauman, biology and pre-veterinary major, Laura Sass, adult/young adolescent science education major, and Susan Young, biology major; and undergraduate students Lauren Bisson, senior biology major, and Molly Smith, junior adult/young adolescent science education major.

Led by faculty member Gwynne Rife, Ph.D., associate professor of biology, the group arrived in La Paz, Mexico, the capital of the Baja California Sur state, Feb. 17 to meet their hosts – representatives from Ecology Project International (EPI). The organization partners students and scientists, working to improve and inspire science education and conservation efforts worldwide, through field-based student-scientist partnerships. Dwight Moody, Ed.D., professor of biology, also accompanied the group.

During the first part of the trip, UF students joined two EPI representatives, Urban, three members of Urban's research team and three crew members to conduct a whale observation study. From the research boat *Pez Sapo*, translated as "Toad Fish," teams of four rotated through one-hour "guardias," or watches, to look for whale blows. Three team members stood watch for 15 minutes each at different posts while a fourth team member recorded data.

When a whale blow was spotted, Urban and other team members boarded small boats called pangas and headed out to the whale.

By Brianna (Martin) Patterson '03



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“It was thrilling,” said Young. “You would get in and wait around for the whale to surface again for a breath and then race over to it before it dove back down. My last trip in the panga was amazing. We spent over an hour in the panga trying to spot one, but when we did, we were 10 feet from a blue whale. Getting that close and seeing the largest animal on the planet made the trip for me.”

Once researchers were close enough, they shot the whale with a hollow ended arrow, capturing a piece of the skin and blubber from which to draw data such as DNA, levels of contaminants and reproduction information. From a small piece of the epidermis, researchers are also able to identify what the whale ate within the last 60 days.

In addition to 16 blue whales, the group saw Bryde’s whales, a rare sighting, bottlenose dolphins, long beaked dolphins, great white sharks, manta rays and sea lions.

“This was a real, authentic research trip. What these students did will actually be used as part of a worldwide project,” said Rife, who plans to offer an in-depth public presentation about the experience in the fall.

After four days of whale watching, the group spent some time immersed in Mexico’s culture. Part of that included preparing presentations about their research for students at Loreto University, located in Baja, Mexico. UF students prepared posters and presented in Spanish, which proved to be challenging because most of the students had no background in the Spanish language until arriving in Mexico just days before.

The final two nights of the trip were spent in El Santuario, an eco-retreat on the edge of the bay Ensenada Blanca, where students explored the outdoors and sang traditional Mexican songs by the campfire.

Both undergraduate and graduate students who participated used their experiences as the basis for presentations during UF’s Symposium for Scholarship and Creativity April 17. Kieffer, who was enrolled in the graduate program during the 2006-2007 academic year, and Labuhn presented “Becoming an Excellent Science Teacher: How Our Research Experience in Baja Mexico Will Support Our Future Teaching.” Bauman, Misson, Sass, Smith and Young presented “Baleen Whales of Baja.”

Trip to Costa Rica Reveals Inequalities

By Anamarie Shober

We went to Costa Rica for the sea turtles; we came back with so much more. We were a group of 20 who know very little about each other and the country we were about to enter. We left as a family coming from a place that had taught us more than any textbook ever could.

On April 8, I began the journey with Hellgate teachers Carla Hinman and Rob Jensen and 17 other students. The trip was part of Ecology Project International, a nonprofit organization that promotes conservation efforts through student-

scientists field projects. We were given the chance to travel to the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica to work with the endangered leatherback sea turtles, in one of the country’s biggest nature reserves.

We were accompanied on our trip by Ruben and Elsie, our EPI guides who were native to Costa Rica. After spending a night in the nation’s capital of San Jose, we traveled by bus to Pacuare Reserve, where we spent five nights patrolling the beach for sea turtles that were hunted by poachers for their eggs. To fight this threat we measured, tagged and relocated the nests of these amazing creatures. A turtle was about 5 feet long.

This experience was indescribable, the power of these

creatures is like nothing I have ever seen . Each patrol lasted from three to five hours and we went out in shifts at different times of the night. Each group saw, on average, two turtles every night. We left Pacuare for La Suerte Rainforest Reserve, which was approximately three hours by bus and boat. On our way we stopped at a Del Monte banana plantation where we witnessed many people working long hours for little pay. This experience was crucial in how I think about my own consumption. The banana corporations have come in and devastated the Costa Rican land and people. We all felt that it is our responsibility to spread our knowledge on this topic and encourage everyone to buy organic fruit. While at La Suerte we went on several hikes in the rain forest and saw creatures and plants that most only dream about .

We took part in several measurement experiments in the forests. We also enjoyed what was decided as the best food ever. On our last night we played a very intense game of

football (soccer) with local villagers and needless to say, we were not victorious. However, it was still a good time had by all.



We followed this stay with a school visit at a local high school, where we exchanged what we could, despite an obvious language barrier.

Our final destination was a stay at Bella Vista Ranch Organic Coffee Plantation followed by a day of rafting the Rio Pacuare, one of the top five rivers to raft in the world. It was a great ending to an amazing trip. Although we experienced illness, fatigue and discomfort, every minute was worth it. The connection felt between the group and the country is something that is irreplaceable. I am so fortunate to have been a part of this amazing trip and am proud to have made a difference for our world's environment.



Parent Recommendation

Hi,

We picked up the kids a bit after midnight last night and Sarah didn't stop talking about the trip til after 2am, when we kicked her out of our bedroom because we had to go to work today. She LOVED it! She even got up early this morning and continued to tell me stories. She said it was totally awesome. She especially raved about the teachers. All of the other kids on the trip felt the same.

You guys have an amazing program. All of the work -the details, hassles, parents calling you with worries -are all worth it when you see the enthusiasm of these teens. I can only imagine what it's like to work with the local students.

Thanks so much for all that you do to pull off these trips. They are clearly life-transforming events (Sarah, who has never gone to a sleep-away camp and rarely even sleeps at other kids' homes, said that she never got homesick and now knows that she can travel, go off to college, etc. without being afraid. This is huge, believe me!). She also said that the El Cerrito group has committed to doing some community service work together here in the bay area.

I'll send you some pictures when I get them. Please tell the staff in Galapagos that the ECHS group LOVED their experience!

Take care,
Lynn Price, Sarah's mom

Student Recommendation



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More Than an Opportunity

Last spring I embarked on my journey with seventeen other students and two teachers to explore and discover a world which was unknown to me.

In the beginning it was one goal; to save the sea turtles, but after only a few minutes in Costa Rica we learned that it would be so much more.

Immersed in culture and surrounded by the streets of the San Jose, we realized that this is a nesting place of people truly happy with living and a pure life, Pura Vida! This would be an experience with nature, weather, culture, survival, strength and most of all with the Ticos (Costa Ricans) who gave us a true sense of happiness in one of its simplest forms. It is truly breathtaking to be in some strange new place and meeting new people, it is an opportunity to understand the world and take your view and turn it on its head, upside down and all around to see every aspect from every angle. It is about problem and cause and fixing it. It is about discovery and understanding. It is about relations to all living things animals and humans and their values.

This is more than just a trip, an opportunity. It is something far greater than words have to describe. To be able to reach out and journey, not just to seek education and culture from other worlds, but to actually become them. It is to truly live and breathe with their problems and try to help. We cannot fix everything, though a journey like this will make you want to try, but we can understand the roots of our problems. Yes, our problems, this is our world and our people and we can open our eyes and help educate those that can help and are willing to listen to those who want to see a change. There is not enough time to sit back and watch beauty die out, a species die out. We have to join together and make people care. Sometimes we forget that we can make a difference, but Ecology Project helped me and many students like me, open our hearts and minds to people and things foreign to us.

Ecology Project helps us realize we can be the change we want to see and then actually go and apply it. Not many people think about traveling for the sake of offering a helping hand, but rather for fun and excitement. Truly this experience led to a lifetime of excitement and drive, to be a catalyst, to rally our peers and show the world we will not stand for this disgrace. Ecology Project is starting this motion for acceptance, understanding and change. It creates minds that do not fret a two mile walk on the beach, or blisters, bugs, heat and discomfort, but embrace them and cherish them as something so life changing you can never come back untouched.



What an honor to travel and work with the Ecology Project instructors and scientist, each one with such fiery passion and drive that they motivate us and awe us into action. It is not just an opportunity, but a gift, self understanding and memories that will not ever fade. To truly look back and say, I have changed this, I have done this with my own hands, I have loved so selflessly and cared so fully is the true opportunity. Ecology Project has changed so many lives and the difference is we can see. Like our footprints in the sand we left behind for others to follow, they become part of the earth as they disappear under the waves; we too have become part of the Earth.

Thank You EPI,
Brittany Brady

Teacher Recommendation



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To those considering an adventure with EPI:

It is with sincere pleasure and excitement to have the opportunity to write a letter of reference for Ecology Project International (EPI). The type of experience gained by all who participate in one of the EPI programs is exceptional on so many levels. Each trip is truly a life-changing experience and one to savor and share for a lifetime.

I am a life science teacher at Bishop O'Dowd High School in Oakland, California. In twelve years of teaching both biology and advanced placement biology, I have taken students on many educational trips including to foreign countries. My experience with each travel company has been very good and the trips have all been very good as well. Without a doubt, EPI has set the bar at a much higher level in terms of travel experiences, before, during, and after each trip.

Every member of the EPI team is very well trained, experienced in his/her field, helpful with individual issues, and overall very friendly. They are accessible for questions and helpful in preparing students for all that they will encounter on a trip. The web site and handouts available through EPI have guided many parents and students so well, that questions for me as a teacher are minimal. In working with other companies, I have noticed that information is not always timely and sometimes comes so late that it adds to the stress of going on a trip of this magnitude. EPI has never put me in that position and has been able to streamline the process including when emergency or last-minute issues have prevailed.

While on location with EPI, the experience is even better. The students have a very full schedule that includes a wide diversity of experiences- both educational and fun. The instructors are very knowledgeable in their field and great with students. All levels of students have enjoyed the trips with EPI and have had successful experiences. Every student comes back with a broader sense of the world and other cultures, a phenomenal experience in field science, and a life-long memory. For most, they have a strong desire to go back and some already have with their own families. I can also say that the teachers have an equally exceptional experience.

I cannot more highly recommend the EPI program. They make it worth the work it takes to organize all that is involved to go. This is a quality program- well designed, well planned, well presented, and it is obvious that they (EPI instructors) enjoy what they do. As a teacher and as a biologist myself, the experience is unforgettable. But to see these experiences through the eyes of your students has even much more impact.

Take advantage of this opportunity and go!

Timory Newman
Science Department Chair
Bishop O'Dowd High School
Oakland, California





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