



## ***Instructionally Related Activities Report Form***

SPONSOR: SEAN ANDERSON

DEPARTMENT: ESRM

ACTIVITY TITLE: **SERVICE LEARNING IN NEW ORLEANS (ESRM 492)**

DATE (S) OF ACTIVITY: MARCH 14-24, **2013**

E-mail to the IRA Coordinator with supporting documentation at [lisa.ayre-smith@csuci.edu](mailto:lisa.ayre-smith@csuci.edu) within 30 days after the activity.

*Thank you for your commitment to engaging our students!!*

### **Course Description**

Students from ESRM 492 participated in an intense 11-day field course in and around New Orleans, Louisiana. We examined the management drivers that led to the man-made disasters that we know as Hurricane Katrina and the *Deepwater Horizon* Oil Spill. This course was a mix of tours by local experts, discussions with survivors and residents, environmental impact assessment, restoration efforts to reverse Katrina-induced degradation and the rebuilding of communities. For the previous three years we de-emphasized the physical rebuilding of structures and have turned towards installing community food gardens in impoverished neighborhoods, splitting most trip days roughly evenly between garden installations and wetland restoration work.

Students traveled to New Orleans, Louisiana to examine first hand the on-going disruptions to daily life and the lingering impacts of poor coastal resource management. We spent the first two days touring around the greater New Orleans region. Our travels initially focused on the drivers of wetland loss and historic mismanagement of the Mississippi River delta by the Army Corps of Engineers, local levee boards, *etc.* The rest of the week found us conducting environmental impact assessments and wetland restoration projects in Belle Chase's Woodlands Trail and Park (one of the few remnant bottomland hardwood forests surrounding Greater New Orleans). We worked on both our routine wetland property (in Plaquemines Parish) and our adjacent, newly acquired wetland property (in Orleans Parish). Guest speakers and collaborators came from Tulane University, Louisiana State University, the United States Geological Survey, the New Orleans Mayor Office, Basin Street Records, *etc.* Our final days were devoted to building and planting community food gardens, partnering with Common Grounds community center in Buras, LA, New Orleans Food and Farm Network across greater New Orleans, and Grow Dat Farms in New Orleans' City Park.

We held our annual poster/video/gumbo presentation session later in the semester (on April 18) in Broome Library. Our students documented aspects of New Orleans culture and/or



the recovery efforts with which they were engaged. A perennially popular aspect of our campus event is our cooking demonstration/exhibition by our students (who train with master Chefs at the New Orleans School of Cooking during our trip). At least **113 people** (students, staff, *etc.*) attend this post-trip session.

### Activity Relationship

Our entire course was the IRA activity. We met all of our targeted learning outcomes:

While this trip was organized around one particular region, many of the lessons and learning outcomes bear directly on life far afield from southern Louisiana; across the Coastal Zone of California and beyond. These core outcomes included:

- understanding the links between environmental quality and human well
- understanding that incompetent and corrupt leadership kills
- appreciating the influence of New Orleans culture on American visual and musical arts
- empowerment through community service
- fostering active citizenship
- understanding the importance of access to affordable, healthy food for all peoples
- materially contributing to the recovery of Louisiana coast

### Activity Strengths

This course is unique in that our students conduct restoration and other service activities amongst a degraded and often ignored part of our country. There is no substitute for embedded experiences such as this. Discussing failed coastal management when 1) you are in an eroding coastline 2) desperately trying to bring back vegetation that should naturally exist there with few resources while 3) talking to folks who are seeing their houses and livelihoods swept away while 4) political leaders and those in positions power seem to go about their business or be nonplussed by the goings on is priceless.

### Activity Weaknesses

This greatest limitation here is time. We are in Louisiana for such a short period of time, I need to work the students tremendously hard to accomplish our many goals and complete our pledged service. This often pushes many of them to their limits. It would be great if we could have even an additional week to allow for a somewhat ore relaxed pace of the course.

### How would you improve for next time?

This is hard to say. I have been refining this course for the better part of a decade. I am constantly adjusting my course, adding various experiences and dropping others. I solicit suggestions from my students, collaborators, and fellow faculty as to how to best adjust my class.



My most recent suggestions have been relatively minor, suggesting alternate speakers and requests for slightly more “free” or down time.

What did you learn from the process?

I have learned much. The value of Service Learning and the value of embedding students in challenging situations are irreplaceable in a curriculum centered around interdisciplinary problem solving. These types of classes are often quite dynamic and are almost the inverse of traditional, classroom-based courses. While detailed planning is essential for both, these field-based Service Learning courses must often be adapted on the fly and adjusted to meet the demands of the particular situation (weather, last minute schedule changes with our partners, *etc.*). Such experiences are more like conducting a jazz ensemble rather than a Baroque quintet.

What are student responses?

Student A:

“The trip to New Orleans was an amazing experience. The amount we accomplished in less than two week was, from my point of view, impressive. I learned so much about the Gulf coast and still retain that information, which is hard to say for most classes I attend. Having the experience of actually going into the environment and learn while working makes the experience that much more fulfilling and I would do it again in a heartbeat. The value a student can gain from service learning is so profound that it is hard to put into words. The amount of respect one can gain from immersing yourself in this type of work is life changing and almost a month later I still think about the trip several times a day.

The trip is an experience and I am glad I was able to take part. However, there are several aspects of the trip that are very difficult physically and I am incredibly glad I came prepared with all the supplies that were suggested. Coming on this trip not prepared physically and mentally for what you are about to do, I think, can either make or break the experience for people. The physical work in my opinion wasn’t easy, especially coming from having very minimal field work. My point of view of the trip was that it taught me more than I ever would have learned sitting in a class room. I gained so much from the experience and I don’t think people realize the impact these types of classes offer students. I thought the trip was very rewarding. I learned a great deal and was even able to learn about the culture. I plan on going back.”

Student B:

“This comment is in regard to Dr. Sean Anderson and our New Orleans Service Learning Class. If it were not for the passion for people and knowledge of and compassion for our environment that Dr. Sean Anderson possesses, the ESRM 492 class would not exist, and the numerous trips to and the enhancement of and the relief provided the city of New Orleans, would not exist. It takes a lot of heart, time, money, blood, sweat, tears, and sacrifice to make this Service Learning Internship happen, and the people of Louisiana are grateful for the involvement of Dr. Anderson and the students of CSUCI with the rebuilding of a people and a city. This class is important for those in New Orleans who are being helped, as well as those of us students that have the opportunity to partake in this humbling experience. This class could not continue

without the knowledge and passion of Dr. Sean Anderson.

**Student C:**

“Although at the time, I did not grasp what the trip was going to mean to me, the experience was extremely fulfilling and beneficial to my college education. There is a huge difference between being lectured to about a topic in a classroom and going into the field and experiencing it first hand.

It is unbelievable that after so many years the amount of destruction that is still left over. Entire communities have not even begun to have cleanup except for homes being gutted. Rich communities have been completely finished, while poor neighborhoods are still begging for help.

It is sad to think that our government would allow abandonment of cities and regions such as what has happened in Louisiana.”

**Student D:**

“Everything about this class was great. I loved the way he had us learn about the area in and around NOLA before we left for the trip. We crammed everything we could into the short time we had. Although, we were not forced to do it. It was a life changing experience and I am more knowledgeable and a better person after this trip.”

**ESRM 492 Spring 2013 SETE Responses (n=10 of 12 enrolled students responded)**  
(Point Scale: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1)

Q1: I understood the learning outcomes expected from the course.	3.6 ± 0.49
Q2: To me, the course content seemed well organized.	3.4 ± 0.66
Q3: To me, class sessions seemed well organized.	3.5 ± 0.67
Q4: Class sessions furthered my understanding of the course material.	3.9 ± 0.30
Q5: Examples and illustrations aided my understanding.	3.8 ± 0.40
Q6: General concepts helped me see connections among specific topics.	3.9 ± 0.30
Q7: The course was a valuable learning experience for me.	3.9 ± 0.30
Q8: The assignments in this course aided my learning.	3.8 ± 0.40
Q9: I was able to use instructor feedback to increase my learning.	3.4 ± 0.68
Q10: I learned ways of reasoning that I could apply to other disciplines.	3.6 ± 0.49
Q11: My learning experience increased my appreciation for the subject.	3.9 ± 0.30
Q12: I gained awareness of relevance and importance of material.	3.9 ± 0.30
Q13: The course made a relevant contribution to my overall education.	3.8 ± 0.40
Q14: I felt I was evaluated fairly in this class.	3.6 ± 0.50
Q15: I felt I was treated with respect in this class.	3.7 ± 0.46
Q16: The class atmosphere supported my learning.	3.5 ± 0.50
Q17: I felt encouraged to contribute civil dialogue to this class.	3.7 ± 0.46
Q18: When I sought outside help from the instructor, I received it.	3.6 ± 0.49
Q19: I felt welcome to seek help and advice from the instructor.	3.5 ± 0.50
Q20: The help I received from the instructor was useful to my learning.	3.4 ± 0.66



## Expense Summary

Monies were spent to cover airfare, ground transportation, lodging, and meals. Additionally we paid for various experiences in New Orleans (jazz concerts, cooking classes, *etc.*). Finally we paid for supplies for our service projects (plants, soil amendments, pvc pipe, marker twine, *etc.*).

## Attachments (separate files):

- 1) Student Attendees
- 2) *Louisiana Advocate* News Story, March 2013  
<http://theadvocate.com/news/neworleans/5513550-148/california-college-students-delve-into>
- 3) New Orleans *Times-Picayune* News Story, March 2013  
[http://blog.nola.com/westbank/2013/03/bond\\_between\\_woodlands\\_conserv.html](http://blog.nola.com/westbank/2013/03/bond_between_woodlands_conserv.html)
- 4) Select Images from New Orleans Trip, March 2013
- 5) Select Images from Poster/Gumbo/Video Session at CSUCI, April 2013



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# California college students delve into wetlands conservation



BY KARI DEQUINE HARDEN  
*New Orleans bureau*  
March 25, 2013

COMMENTS



Print article

BELLE CHASSE — As the Gulf of Mexico creeps closer and closer to New Orleans, the forested wetlands in between provides a crucial storm buffer between open water and the city.

The Woodlands Trail in Belle Chasse will be one of the largest such protective wooded areas left in the next 35 to 50 years, Katie Brasted, executive director of the Woodlands Conservancy, said.

And it is precisely that peaceful park, located next to English Turn, that

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Sean Anderson and his college students have come to from California for the past six years to help save.

An associate professor of environmental science and resource management, Anderson, and Oregon State University associate professor of horticulture John Lambrinos, started bringing students to New Orleans in 2007.

The annual trip is part of a service learning class at California State University Channel Islands devoted entirely to the multitude of social, political and environmental issues surrounding the rebuilding of the region after Hurricane Katrina.

Part of the trip always includes multiple days trekking through the forest at Woodlands, collecting data and documenting invasive species so that the area, faced by increasingly frequent and damaging storm events, can be restored and conserved.

Throughout last week, the team of 12 undergraduate students and one Oregon graduate student mapped out plots, counted and identified plants and measured how well the targeted treatment of invasive species is working.

“There are so many reasons to save this land,” Anderson said, calling it an “energy sponge” for both wind and water. Brasted said the area is also a vital habitat for more than 165 species of migratory birds.

The 35- to 50-year prediction is “incredibly conservative” in terms of looming land loss, Anderson said. “It’s more on the 30 side.”

Fighting sea level rise and subsidence, the rates of change are happening faster than initially thought, he said.

Each year it’s Anderson’s goal for the students to listen, learn and embed themselves into the culture. There’s no pity in their mission, he said. And there’s nothing in the classroom, or in California, that can replace the hands-on experiential learning that happens during the spring break trip.

The students’ schedule is a busy one. Over 11 days, daylight is spent getting dirty working on community garden and wetland restoration projects. Nights are spent at seafood boils in the bayou, dancing in Frenchmen Street venues, bowling to Zydeco music and visiting with chefs, writers, and other local luminaries, including Kermit Ruffins, Harry Shearer, Irvin Mayfield, Mark Schleifstein, Paul Sanchez, and Ivor van Heerdan.

They also take a failed levee tour with Tulane Professor Steve Nelson, seeing firsthand where, why and to what extent the different parts of the city flooded, as well as the repairs and improvements made since Katrina.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster has also been incorporated into the curriculum, with a visit this year to the courtroom to watch part of the BP trial.

Service learning is a major component at CSU Channel Islands, the system’s newest school where a majority of the students are first-generation college students, Anderson said. The trip is only possible through the assistance of school funds, which provide about two thirds of the cost while the students contribute the remainder.

Right after Katrina, Anderson said he threw out his lesson plans and began teaching a class about issues surrounding the storm. His students wanted to do something more, but Anderson told them that the best they

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could do at the time was raise money. They raised \$24,000 and donated it to the Red Cross.

Anderson said his students then said, “OK, we did that — now take us there.” Anderson and Lambrinos took an exploratory trip in 2006.

The first few years they spent most of their days gutting houses — trying to address whatever needs were most immediate. But then by a stroke of luck, they were seeking someone who needed help and got hooked up with Brasted and Woodlands.

Brasted needed an invasive species assessment done to get \$40,000 in FEMA money to begin clearing the trails. It was purely by coincidence that the skills required were Anderson and Lambrinos’ areas of expertise.

The primary invasive species are Chinese Tallow, Chinaberry, and Chinese Privet, which can inhibit the regrowth of native vegetation. While the species typically stay on the edge of the forest, Anderson said that Katrina and subsequent storms spread the invasive plants further into the forest.

Lambrinos said that unfortunately, they aren’t seeing much improvement in the health of the forest. The canopy is increasingly open, and the invasive species recover more quickly than native ones after the number of storms that have hit since they first saw the area in 2007.

With each storm, the older trees take a beating, he said, pointing to old cypress trees on the verge of collapse. On the positive side, Lambrinos said that they are seeing encouraging results of the herbicides being used to target the unwanted species.

This year, Hurricane Isaac is part of the curriculum.

In January, the nonprofit Woodlands Conservancy purchased an additional 190 acres of bottomland hardwood wetlands in Lower Coast Algiers, adjacent to the trails. The acquisition from the Archdiocese of New Orleans will now ensure the conservation of the land and wildlife habitat.

Anderson said that while he has worked on restoration projects all over the world, the wetlands require the most sophisticated type of restoration, and it is a science that still has a long way to go. But even if experiments fail, Anderson said, that’s fine as long as something is learned in the process.

The long-term monitoring will help discover how to more effectively and cost-efficiently restore the land, he said. The Woodland Trails are an ideal location: close enough to the Gulf without being too close, he said. And it incorporates both Plaquemines and Orleans Parishes.

In addition to the restoration work, the students also contribute to fresh and sustainable food projects. They spent one day learning about New Orleans culture and history through food, starting with a trip to the farmer’s market, followed by cooking lessons. Throughout the week they also worked in the garden at Café Hope, a community garden in Buras, and at Grow Dat Youth Farm.

Early in the week, the consensus of Anderson’s students was that they were more than happy to put in the hard work and were thoroughly enjoying getting to know a culture and community very different than southern California.

“Everyone we meet is insanely nice, and interested in what we are doing,”



student Peter Vegos said. They are also very grateful, Vegos said.

They said they were extremely appreciative that their school helped fund the trip and that they never would have been able to get the same learning experience in the classroom. And without Anderson's inside knowledge and packed week of activities, people and projects, they said they never would have the opportunity for the all-embracing insight into the city and surrounding area.

As the students prepared to return to California on Sunday, Anderson said he and Lambrinos will stay on for a few extra days, continuing assessments of the conservancy's new acreage, as well as doing research as part of a national team looking into the ecotoxicology of the Deepwater Horizon spill.

Anderson said he is always looking for ways to make sure the program — both the student trip and the monitoring of the Woodlands — gets the necessary funding and continues, as well as ways to expand the educational opportunities to other universities.

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# Bond between Woodlands Conservancy and California State University continues to grow

## VIDEO: Invasive Assessment



**VIDEO: Invasive Assessment** ([http://videos.nola.com/times-picayune/2009/03/video\\_non\\_invasive\\_assessment.html](http://videos.nola.com/times-picayune/2009/03/video_non_invasive_assessment.html))

Sean Anderson California State U Channel Islands, and professor John Lambrinos from Oregon State University spent several days during their spring break at the Woodlands Trail in Belle Chasse conducting an assessment of non native invasive species

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(<http://connect.nola.com/user/coturner/index.html>) By **Cory Turner, Algiers Columnist**  
(<http://connect.nola.com/user/coturner/posts.html>)

on March 26, 2013 at 4:55 PM, updated April 01, 2013 at 2:36 PM

It all started in 2007, after a fateful call to Executive Director of The Woodlands Conservancy Katie Brasted from Brenda Puckett of Hands of Hope in Belle Chasse. Pucket was coordinating volunteer efforts and was looking for some work for a visiting group to participate in.

The group, led by Sean Anderson from California State University Channel Islands, was in town during spring break to help the area rebuild after Hurricane Katrina.

The only need Brasted had, at the time, was for an assessment of invasive species of plants that started taking over the forested area at the Woodlands Trail after the hurricane decimated the old growth canopy. Though there was a property assessment before the storm, to even apply for grants to restore the forest, there had to be a post-storm assessment and Brasted had no resources for this project.

Brasted said that, after Hurricane Katrina, the previously dense forest looked more like a field of toothpicks, leading to conditions that were welcoming to tallow and other invasive species that would prevent the recovery of the area's ecosystem.

This project was actually a perfect match for Anderson, who serves as an associate professor of the college's Environmental Science and Resources Management program. The visiting group immediately started the process of assessing the storm's damage and its after-effects.

Since the first visit, Anderson has taken numerous trips to the area to work on the project, along with bringing service learning students each year to continue studies.

Anderson says that the forest is one of the largest forested landscapes between the Gulf of Mexico and the City of New Orleans. The forest provides a storm buffer for the city; but, unfortunately, tallow does very little to act as a defense, which is why restoration is so important.

In addition to offering protection for the human residents of the area, the forest also offers refuge to birds as they return from their southern migration. Nearly 30 percent to 40 percent of all migratory species visit the habitat. Unfortunately, a jungle of invasive

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species does not offer the same quality of shelter or food a native hardwood forest would offer, increasing mortality rates.

Since Anderson's first visit, the group, along with collaborators with the University of California San Diego, Loyola Marymount University, and Oregon State University, has implemented projects to eliminate invasive species and to replant and nurture native cypress growth.

The project has evolved over time and has become a model to study best practices in reforestation. During this year's spring break, visiting students were assessing the results of remediation work previously done through their project. In addition, they were gathering the results of different planting strategies.

The costs for the trips have been paid, mostly, by California State University Channel Island, with only one third of the cost being contributed by the participating students. Most of the other costs are covered by the university and its collaborators.

While in Louisiana, Anderson tries to give the students a full picture of the area and its culture. The group also works with food gardens in Plaquemines Parish, with Café Hope in Marrero, and with the Grow Dat Youth Farm in New Orleans. He also introduces students to the area's music and musicians.

Anderson and Brasted both have a goal of training local residents to take over the work they have begun, thus impacting the local work force. Additionally, they want to build a local capacity for replicating work in other areas of the country, but there is much work left here to accomplish first.

Recently, the Woodlands Conservancy added 190 acres in Orleans Parish to their tract. During the students' latest visit, a group was tasked with assessing that property for the first time. The results of that assessment will guide future work needed there.

For more information on the Woodlands Conservancy, visit [www.woodlandsconservancy.org](http://www.woodlandsconservancy.org) or call 504.433.4000.

**Orleans Parish Assessor Erroll G. Williams** will hold a business seminar April 3 from 10 to 11 a.m. at Craige Center, 1800 Newton St., Old Algiers, to help small business owners fill out their Personal Business Property Self Reporting Form (LAT 5), which can also be submitted online at [www.nolaassessor.com](http://www.nolaassessor.com). The question-and-answer sessions will feature Business Personal Property Supervisor Mickey Markey.

The sessions are free and will offer staff assistance regarding completion and online submittal of the form. The LAT 5 is a declaration of a businesses' merchandise/inventory, if applicable, and the cost and year of purchase of fixed assets, such as equipment and furnishings. The forms were recently mailed to all commercial

entities in Orleans Parish and are due April 30. The forms are available for download at the assessor's website. Reservations can be made by calling 504.897.6152 or emailing bcodevin@aol.com.

*Cory Turner is an Algiers resident who writes about events of community interest. You can contact him at 504.300.6045 or algiershappenings@yahoo.com.*

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Post a job <http://www.nola.com/real-estate.nola.com/rent/>  
Site Map <http://www.nola.com/site-map/products/>  
Webcams/Live! <http://www.nola.com/live/>

## Your Regional News Pages

New Orleans <http://www.nola.com/neworleans/>  
Northshore/St. Bernard <http://www.nola.com/northshore-st-bernard/>  
Metairie <http://www.nola.com/metairie/>  
Plaquemines <http://www.nola.com/plaquemines/>  
River Parishes <http://www.nola.com/river-parishes/>  
East Jefferson <http://www.nola.com/east-jefferson/>  
Baton Rouge <http://www.nola.com/baton-rouge/>  
West Bank <http://www.nola.com/west-bank/>

## Follow Us

Twitter <http://www.twitter.com/nolanews>  
Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/nolanews>  
Google+ <https://plus.google.com/10588328875270>

## Mobile

Mobile View <http://mobile.nola.com/advnola/index.htm>  
Mobile Apps <http://www.nola.com/mobile-device/index.ssf/applications>  
FAQ <http://www.nola.com/mobile-device/index.ssf/faq>





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