

boatman's quarterly review



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Northern Arizona University's Grand Canyon Semester— Newest Stewards for the Grand Canyon Region

ON A BRIGHT August day, a select group of Honors students and faculty gathered at the South Rim's Mather Campground, soon to become a tight-knit community devoted to an entire semester of place-based, experiential learning. That late sum-



mer day marked the beginning of Northern Arizona University's Grand Canyon Semester (GCS), the third to be offered through a joint partnership of the National Collegiate Honors Council, Northern Arizona University (NAU) and Grand Canyon National Park.

Grand Canyon Semesters are integrated learning experiences in the humanities and sciences. Using an interdisciplinary approach, students study the environmental and social challenges confronting us in the 21st century. Students, many of whom had never seen the Grand Canyon before, examined and charted water's economic, political, artistic, ecological, social, and spiritual forces in both the classroom and the field focusing specifically on the greater Grand Canyon Region. This semester's experience proved to be an exciting and educational journey for the participants, who now better understand why the protection of our beautiful and fragile Canyon is so important.

The semester began with a week of orientation on the South Rim. Students explored the park and engaged in discussions and talks given by Park Superintendent Dave Ueberuaga and other park representatives, facilitated by Park educators Jacob Fillion and Megan Kohli. GCS faculty introduced

students to park management, anthropology, history, geology and environmental topics. A highlight of orientation week was a barbecue at Shoshone Point, where renowned artist Bruce Aiken shared his inspirations about the painting the Canyon against the backdrop of a Grand Canyon sunset.

During the semester, students enrolled in courses covering Grand Canyon geology, anthropology, policy, ecology, and art and literature. They traveled to the Hopi and the Navajo reservations, nearby national monuments and other locations in the Park and on the Plateau where they heard from stakeholders who shared cultural, scientific and personal perspectives about water and its relationship to the greater Grand Canyon region. Students participated in service projects in the Park throughout the semester as well.

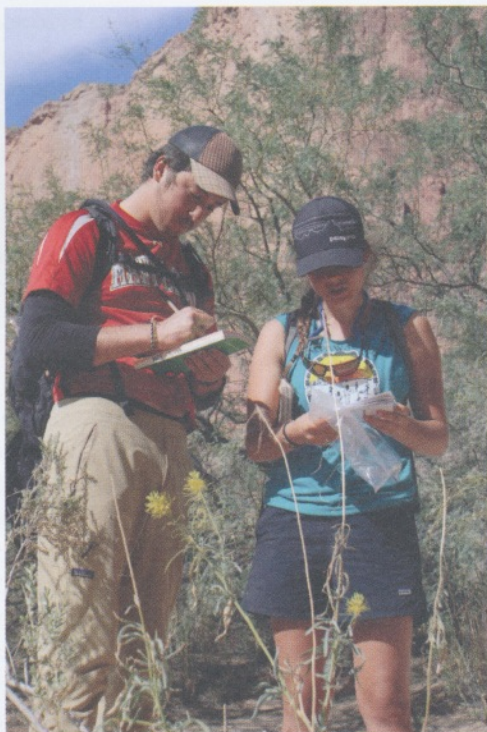
In particular, two field experiences made a dramatic impact on students. One was a multi-day stay at Kane Ranch in House Rock Valley, hosted by Grand Canyon Trust. Using the ranch as a base camp for four days, they visited the North Rim and the condor release site on the Paria Plateau, where Peregrine Foundation Condor Project coordinator, Chris Parish, talked to them about re-introduction of this magnificent bird. They also toured Glen Canyon Dam, listening to the Bureau of Reclamation's perspective on Colorado River management. Roger Clark of Grand Canyon Trust discussed uranium mining on the Plateau, and students and faculty debated a myriad of



park management issues during their time at Kane.

Students also rafted the Colorado, sponsored by Grand Canyon National Park, and were kept busy during the day with river lessons and in the evening during in-camp discussions. They were presented with field lessons like "A Day in the Sandals" at Unkar Delta and "Grocery-Shopping in the Wilderness" at Saddle Canyon and pulled camelthorn and Russian thistle from camping beaches. One rainy afternoon at the Confluence students stood with their toes in the Little Colorado and learned about the controversial Escalade Tramway Development, debating its pros and cons. They hiked side canyons, heard stories about Canyon explorers, snapped countless photographs, rowed rapids, journaled, sketched and described the trip as "magical" and "life-changing." Many hoped to return as river guides, ecologists and activists. The group found themselves back on campus experiencing post-river trip blues and longing for the river, having made a powerful connection that they will never forget.

The semester finished with an academic symposium at NAU, where formal research projects were



presented on relevant topics ranging from Katie Lee to the public's involvement in the stakeholder process to coal mining on the Colorado Plateau. Bruce Aiken generously donated his studio space during December's First Friday Art Walk in Flagstaff for an end of semester celebration highlighting the students' remarkable creativity. Paintings, ammo can art, sketches, songs, poetry and spoken word readings, all inspired by the Canyon, were shared with the Flagstaff community.

NAU's Grand Canyon Semester was a resounding success. Students made lifelong friends and incorporated life-changing experiences through this place-based experiential learning curriculum.

They left with a new-found passion for the Canyon and a deeper understanding of the need for protection of the greater Grand Canyon region that they promised to share with their own communities as they returned home.

For more information about Grand Canyon Semester, visit <http://nau.edu/honors/gcs/>.

Robyn S. Martin

On The Eddy Line

I HAVE BEEN MOVING FAST, for a long time now. So fast that I don't even remember which way the bow was facing when the river's tongue swept me up or what my plan had been when I was standing at the edge, scouting the rapid. I'm in an eddy now and my heart is still beating but I'm not looking upstream or listening for the roar of the next wave train, I'm letting the gentle force of the contradicting waters hypnotize me. I'm embracing this stillness and for the first time in a long time, I feel the depth and potential of the water. Like every moment, this one is a culmination of all the ones before it—the series of damp winters I spent in the Northwest, the voice of Edward Abbey sneaking in the seams of my environmental policy classes, the weeks I spent in the back of my father's land cruiser searching out the most beautiful and remote places on the map—and my deep-rooted sense of adventure that

is the product of all these moments. It is these experiences and everything in-between that flow beneath me, but it is the endless contortion of the canyon walls that carry the river around the next bend and bring light to new shade and perspective—the catalyst for my own intellectual and emotional development. It is through my peers' unique perspectives of this region, the integration of fundamentally different but interwoven academic discussions and the knowledge that my time in this region will expand beyond the parameters of this semester, that my own connection to this place has been rejuvenated and enhanced.

There is a beauty in discovery that I feel unable to put words to, but it is a beauty that I seek out above all else. It is the joy I felt when my plane landed in Portland for the first time or when later that year the leaves on the trees were suddenly orange—and then one day

there were no leaves at all. It's the beauty I found at the top of Volcan Tajumulco as the full moon caused clouds to cast shadows over Guatemala City—it's that feeling you get when you realize there is still so much you don't know. As I drove Interstate 17 from Tucson to Flagstaff, I didn't feel any of that—the newness, the discovery, the excitement. I drove through expansive desert quickly and mindlessly and the brush turned to pine in the same place that it always does. I held on the anticipation of meeting new friends and discovering their stories. In retrospect, it was probably right then that my momentum began to slow but I didn't really feel the change in pace until the next day when we arrived at Shoshone Point. I left distracted footprints in the sand as I stepped out of my life and into the Canyon's magnetic field. It was not my first time looking out onto the raw buttes and into the depths of the inner gorge, but it was the first time I felt a pull so strong I couldn't move. I attribute the magnitude of the experience partly to my own state of mind but more than anything I think I was feeling the reverence of those around me. I realized that I only represented a fraction of the lenses through which the canyon was being viewed—Deana from Arkansas, Solaine from New York, Kyle from Florida and all the rest—they brought their own histories and their own stories and because of that, the filters in their eyes saw hues in the rock that I only hoped to discover.

I spent a lot of time alone that night, grounding myself in place and imagining the Colorado River roaring through what seemed to be the center of the earth. I imagined what it must be like to arrive here from Pennsylvania, like Madeline had or from Georgia, like Clara. I imagined that they might feel like I had when I saw the Teton Mountain Range in Wyoming for the first time or when I finally dipped my toes in the Atlantic Ocean. I realized that their discovery of this place was allowing me to rediscover it and to look at it in ways that hadn't occurred to me before. Bruce Aiken, Grand Canyon artist, leant another perspective, one that was in stark contrast to my own and to my peers who were just seeing this canyon for the first time. Bruce spent a significant portion of his life in the canyon, where he lived in a cabin at Roaring Springs and supplied Phantom Ranch with water for thirty years. As he explained it, pumping water was simply a means to living the life he wanted. Bruce recalls arriving at the Grand Canyon for the first time and feeling so drawn in by its power that he never wanted to leave, and so he found a way to stay. Bruce's paintings and words are a reflection of a thoughtful and intimate relationship with the canyon—and like my peers, Bruce brought to light colors that my filter

hadn't seen before. In that moment, the panorama in front of me became a multi-exposure image and the canyon's possibilities seemed endless. I realized that whether you'd never seen the Canyon before or you'd spent your life living in it; all eyes see different shape and different color and that the beauty and the wonder of the canyon was enhanced for me when I incorporated all those varying perspectives into my own.

The emotional connection I feel to this land has made me highly receptive to the wide range of academic perspectives that I am offered in the Grand Canyon Semester. Learning about the canyon from many different angles has started to build a framework for which my intellectual and emotional understanding can come together and grow. I've been an engaged student for fifteen years, but never has an academic setting reciprocated the inquiry and analysis that I've brought forth—until now. I'm discovering this symbiotic relationship between ecology and people that yes, I've always known about, but never really understood. I'm learning that contradictory to the fact that water pours from my tap today, the Colorado's dwindling flow of water cannot keep pace with the region's demands. I'm starting to understand how the scarcity of water in this region minimizes primary production, leaving this ecosystem with just a few key species and how that plays a role in a 12,000 year old culture's ability to develop distinct and flexible adaptations to this region. It is through integrative analysis and application of these fundamental ideas that I am able to better understand the roles that water plays in the southwest. By looking at this region through various lenses, I am forced to ask questions like "what is my role in this relationship?" and rather than answers, I'm provided with experience, through which I am slowly but surely responding to my own questions.

The real benefit of this semester, and maybe just experiential education in general, is that classroom discussions and ideas are easily facilitated in the field. As we rise in elevation towards the San Francisco Peaks I notice the transformation as ponderosa pine forest becomes mixed conifer forest, an ecological segregation that Merriam categorized as his 'Life Zone Theory'. And then, as the air gets warmer as we drive away from the peaks towards the Navajo Reservation, I recognize Hopkin's "Bioclimatic Law" as I return my fleece to my backpack. After a weekend of exposure to the reality of desert agriculture and a community's reliance on infrequent precipitation, I run up and down the Hopi Mesa as a part of a culture that is deeply rooted in the idea of "Paatuwaqatsi"—the bond of water, land and life. It is these moments, when I'm out in the world living what I learn that I feel most present and engaged

in the transformation that this experience is facilitating.

In December, when all but one of my peers pack up their things and leave the Colorado Plateau for their respective homes, I will remain here—in this place I know so deeply. I believe that knowing this has motivated me to be slow and thoughtful in my learning of this region. It is propelling me to create a three-dimensional and tangible map of my surroundings and to fill in the spaces with a blend of my intellect and emotion. I have not lived in a lot of places, but I have traveled enough to be able to make a clear distinction between my experiences here thus far and my experiences in other places I've been—one is so much richer than the other. The first history teacher I ever had quoted Wallace Stegner on our first day of class; she said, "if you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are." I think I was born with an innate appreciation for place that allowed me to initially understand what Stegner was talking about, but until recently I don't think I would have been able to articulate how that appreciation is significant in my life. Through familiarizing myself with some of the big environmental, cultural, social and even economic conditions that make this region unique, I have a renewed sense of value for the spirit of this place that will radiate far beyond the expiration of this semester.

Moving quickly is an efficient way to scan the surface and catch the big waves, but what I'm discovering is that sometimes the learning doesn't really happen until you're caught in an eddy and forced to really study the waters before you make your next move. And if you're lucky enough to have one partner, or twelve, try on their glasses and view the water through the varying prescriptions—I can guarantee you that you'll find patterns and paths you didn't see before and that when you finally make it down the river, you won't ever see or experience it the same again.

Ariel Weiner