In July 2014 I took off for the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico for a Sea Turtle conservation internship with the Cozumel Sea Turtle Salvation Project. The internship was on the small island called Cozumel, an extremely well-known tourist spot in the area. Cozumel has a small local population that survives on the hundreds of thousands of tourists who visit there each year. Cozumel is a must stop for cruise ships. While this is great for the local economy, cruise ships are a huge source of pollution, which takes a serious toll on the ecosystems, water quality and, specifically for my work, sea turtle populations.

Sea turtles, as well as their eggs, used to be an important and treasured food source for the people of the Yucatan. Today it is illegal to kill the sea turtles for food, but their population numbers are still struggling and poaching can still be a major issue. My time on the island was spent working with the local government and a team to help monitor these turtles. We had various shifts. At night we monitored for female turtles, who can weigh up to 500 pounds, marking nests with GPS coordinates. This shift lasted until 5 am. In the afternoon there was turtle hatching and egg counting to be done. In the heat of the day we slowly uncovered nests of mostly green turtles, each containing around 100-150 eggs.

On a good afternoon we would uncover a nest full of 150 live, sleepy baby turtles, but most days we would uncover 5-7 nests full of unformed embryos or rotting infant turtles; nothing has ever smelled so bad or been as sad. With rising sea temperatures, the nests cannot withstand the humidity under the sand, or are sometimes penetrated by plants thriving in the higher temperatures. Sea turtles’ natural survival rate has always been poor, but it continues to worsen, largely as a result of climate change. Last year (2013) Cozumel marked 5,263 nests, 4,825 were Green turtle nests and 438 Loggerhead nests. This year (2014) numbers are thousands behind where they have been in previous years at this point, but researchers aren’t sure what is causing the low number of turtles to return to Cozumel.

My work with the sea turtles and traveling was so inspiring I decided I wanted more of my education to be in the field. So this coming December I will be leaving for Thailand to study abroad in sustainable agriculture with the University of Montana study abroad course, Sustainable Agriculture in Thailand, led by Professor Josh Slotnik. After completing the course, I plan on traveling through nearby areas in Southeast Asia, taking varies courses in different forms of agriculture and green building as well as volunteering for a variety of projects related to health issues and social justice. I hope to return with a new sense of understanding and mindfulness in my studies and future work. To follow my SE Asia adventures starting January 1st you can see my blog at http://yolli.wordpress.com/

*Lily Piecora is an Environmental Studies major who is minoring in International Development Studies and Global Public Health.
COMMUNITY AIDS EDUCATION INTERNSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

by Rachael Schmoker

My name is Rachael Schmoker, and I am a senior from Fairbanks, Alaska. I am studying Health and Human Performance with an emphasis on Community Health. My minors are IDS and GPH. This past summer I went on an IE3 internship to Cape Town, South Africa to work in a HIV and AIDS organization in the township of Khayelitsha. Alongside these people made me humble because they have overcome so many obstacles to fight for the health of their community. I met a woman who told me that she began a career in HIV counseling after her brother died from AIDS. I met a woman who had been sexually assaulted and now advocates against gender based violence in her community. I also met many people who realized that there was a need to increase their community’s health knowledge and now work full time educating their fellow community members.

This experience was instrumental in validating my future career plans of working in developing countries on the issue of health care access. I was able to learn about a new culture and live in another country while working in my chosen field. Stepping outside of my comfort zone and traveling alone to Africa allowed me to know myself better by challenging me in ways I never knew I would be challenged. I became a more independent person and more confident in my health care abilities.

Being able to use my knowledge of international development and health in a real world setting will set me apart in job and graduate school applications. Working with IE3 gave me the support I needed to complete this experience and excel. I came home from my internship even more passionate about community health work and more in love with Africa. This experience confirmed my career path of going into the Peace Corps and working abroad in Africa. I am so grateful for this opportunity and want to thank the Global Public Health External Advisory Council, the GLI, and the Honors College for awarding me with scholarships that allowed me to complete this experience.

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I spent three months working alongside public health professionals to learn how HIV has impacted their township and what they were doing to decrease its negative effects. Working alongside these people made me humble because they have overcome so many obstacles to fight for the health of their community. I met a woman who told me that she began a career in HIV counseling after her brother died from AIDS. I met a woman who had been sexually assaulted and now advocates against gender based violence in her community. I also met many people who realized that there was a need to increase their community’s health knowledge and now work full time educating their fellow community members.

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IDS Faculty Jill Belsky and Stephen Siebert Collaborate in Bhutan

IDS faculty members Jill Belsky and Stephen Siebert, College of Forestry & Conservation (CFC), participated on faculty exchanges last year, initially with the Center for Development and Environment (CDE) at the University of Bern, Switzerland, and later with the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environment (UWICE), Bhutan. In Bhutan they assisted Sangay Wangchuk, a recent M.S. degree graduate of UM’s CFC, convene the International Society for Ethnobiology Congress, the first international professional association meeting ever held in Bhutan. They also collaborated with UWICE faculty to document social and ecological changes associated with the cessation of historic land use and livelihood practices, specifically sokshing. Sokshing refers to the periodic, managed harvesting of leaves and leaf litter (primarily oak species) for use as livestock fodder and bedding, and as green manure. The practice was formerly widespread throughout Bhutan and helped sustain both rainfed and irrigated agricultural production for centuries. The practice is now declining due to government policies, agrarian change and new market opportunities.

Dr. Phyllis Ngai Ph.D. Receives International Travel Award

Phyllis Ngai, faculty in Communication Studies, received an international travel award from UM’s Office of International Programs to conduct research in Cambodia in June 2014. Her visit to Kratie and Stung Treng in Cambodia was hosted by a well-established local NGO, Cambodia Rural Development Team (CRDT). CRDT specializes in working to improve food security, incomes, and living standards of poor rural communities in support of environmental conservation in northeast Cambodia. Dr. Ngai spent 10 days with CRDT, engaging in case study research on the discourse of sustainable development as applied through the participatory approach. To reciprocate CRDT’s support for her research, she conducted a full-day workshop on “Intercultural communication for the international workplace” for 20 CRDT senior staff members and reviewed the organization’s five-year strategic communication plan. She also delivered a lecture on “Transnational Competence for Development” to 70 undergraduate students majoring in development studies at Chea Sim University of Kamchaymear.

IDS Faculty Peter Koehn on Sabbatical Fall 2014

The University awarded IDS Faculty Peter Koehn sabbatical leave fall 2014 to work on a book that deals with China’s subnational climate change and sustainable development initiatives. While on sabbatical Professor Koehn attended the 2nd International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development held at the International Finance Corporation building in Washington, D.C. and gave the welcoming address at UM’s Model UN Conference.
What is International Development Studies?

International Development Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study focusing on the interconnected processes of social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental change taking place in low-income countries and disadvantaged regions of wealthy countries. Coursework in the minor emphasizes a global perspective on the process of change and development, critical analysis of the role of internal and external influences on the development process, and applications to local (including Montana) situations and challenges. The IDS minor takes advantage of existing faculty expertise and courses to offer an interdisciplinary experience for those students interested in either international or domestic development studies. Students minoring in IDS will develop knowledge and skills appropriate for graduate study and for working in nongovernmental organizations, international and bilateral government development organizations, the U.S. Peace Corps and other national/international equivalents, and/or community-development groups. In addition, completion of the IDS minor qualifies students for a Peace Corps Prep Program Generalist Certificate and IDS oversees seven PCPP specialization certificates.

IDS ALUMI KELSEY McCALL OFF ON HER PEACE CORPS ADVENTURE

In mid-October IDS alum Kelsey McCall left on her two year Peace Corps assignment in the Gambia where she is aspiring to make long lasting, sustainable, qualifying change in her Gambian community by educating all ages in health curriculum that improves lives for many generations. As part of her application process Kelsey identified three professional attributes that will help her meet her aspirations while succeeding as a Peace Corps volunteer. Based on her previous volunteer work Kelsey concluded that her flexibility, positivity, and communication skills will be her best assets while working with her Gambian Community. Her flexibility and positivity makes her a patient, adventurous and fun worker which helped when she was struggling to learn how to carry a 20-gallon badong full of water on her head from the village well to her hut. The learning adventure included a lot of spillage, being laughed at, and a minor goose egg, but as Kelsey puts it “a positive attitude can help turn an unfortunate situation into an adventure, frustration into reflection, and confusion into a learning moment.”

During the training period Kelsey’s mornings are filled with classes, while her afternoons include bike rides to see friends in nearby villages or to Soma, where there is internet and a large market, hauling water, playing with the local kids, drinking attaya – a local sweet green tea, and writing in her journal. In December, at the end of the training period Kelsey will be sworn into the Peace Corps and relocate to her permanent location, Alkali Kunda in the North Bank Region of Gambia. The trip from her training village to her new home for the next two years, where she will be living in a local family’s compound, takes two hours and utilizes five modes of transport, including a ferry and donkey cart. Soon she will be working with local health care providers to do an initial baseline survey of her local community to get an idea of what their health education needs are, and then she will begin developing appropriate projects in the Peace Corps’ four main Health focus areas including; Reproductive and Maternal Health, Maternal and Child Nutrition, Environmental Sanitation including WASH – water and sanitation hygiene, and Malaria Prevention.

Kelsey points to the International Development Studies minor which “strongly incorporated an environmental viewpoint” that allowed her to “understand the importance of how a community’s resources and environmental issues overlap with their culture” as her biggest educational influence towards Peace Corps service as IDS led her to courses and professors that continually sparked her desire to serve abroad as a Peace Corps volunteer. The Peace Corps Prep certificate, including a specialization in Civic Engagement, gave her practical knowledge of grassroots development she needed as well as a competitive edge in her Peace Corps application. To follow Kelsey’s PC adventures visit her blog at http://kelseypeacecorps.wordpress.com.

Upcoming IDS Core Course

Spring 2015:  COMX 204X International and Development Communication  (T 2:10 to 5pm)
               NRSM (FOR/RSCN) 170 International Environmental Change (T R 2:10 to 3:30pm)
               NRSM (FOR/RSCN) 475 Environment & Development (T R 11:10 to 12:30pm)

Summer 2015: PSCI 463 Development Administration (May/June in Mexico)

International Development Studies
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