



Seasons of Life and Land

THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Appendix

David B. Williams writes about his experience in the Refuge this summer.

The following material refers to a University of Washington course about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Although it is not part of the specific project developed by the Burke Museum for this curriculum, we wanted to include a description of the class as an example of how an issue can be approached in an academic setting at the college level.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has become one of the most contentious environmental and political issues of our time. Yet, few people know much beyond the rhetoric and fewer will visit the Arctic Refuge. The University of Washington (UW), however, is trying to remedy this situation, at least for one group of students. In Summer 2005, 12 graduate and undergraduate students were part of an intensive, five-week long class (Choices and Change in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge) offered for the first time ever by the Program on the Environment (POE), an interdisciplinary program that focuses on environmental studies.

"Environmental issues are uniquely interdisciplinary in that they draw upon the physical, biological and social sciences, as well as the arts and humanities, in almost equal measure. The past, present and future of the controversy over oil drilling in the Refuge forms a perfectly packaged microcosm of critical regional and global sustainability issues," says POE co-director and course co-instructor David Secord. Central to this interdisciplinary approach is to give students the opportunity to become unusually well-informed about an issue and then to provide them an opportunity to share the information. At the end of the course, students developed a public exhibit to interpret their experiences and share their insights.

"This course is probably unlike any you have taken and is unlike any I have taught," said Nate Mantua, in his class introduction. Lead instructor and a research scientist at the NOAA/UW Joint Institute for the Study

of the Atmosphere and Oceans, Mantua's speciality is long-term climate patterns, such as El Nino and the Pacific Decadal Oscillation. "Our goal is to attempt to tackle many difficult issues and wrap them into one package. This is going to be an exciting experiment."

Mantua asked the students to give their background and state their top issues for the Refuge. "Caribou, jobs, native peoples and energy independence," said Dustin Andres, a senior in the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies. Others add tourism, ecosystem balance, drilling impacts, climate change, plant and animal sustainability, and wilderness values. The 12 men and women include graduates and undergraduates in programs as diverse as marine affairs, conservation biology, geology, environmental science and resource management, political science and economics.

Two non-students also sat in on the class and joined the group in the Refuge. Ned Backus and Phil Stoller are board members of the Lucky Seven Foundation. Based in Seattle, it supports social services around Puget Sound. "We were already supporting the Subhankar Banerjee show at the Burke, and this was a logical extension," says Backus. "Plus, we wanted to make sure that students of need could attend." Although they were approached for \$5,000, the Lucky Seven ended up providing \$13,500 for student scholarships. In addition, the UW Earth Initiative, the UW Summer School and Tom Campion, founder of Zumiez, provided funding for the course.

For the next six classes, students delved into the issue. Through lectures from experts, readings and class discussions, the students learned about how oil pipelines impact caribou, how native people subsist on the land, the use of water in building ice roads, the impacts of global warming, where and how petroleum is formed, and who is involved in the debate over the Refuge's future. Students quickly began to realize that the issues were more complex than any had imagined. Furthermore, there were far more issues with far broader implications than any



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had considered. One of the experts put it this way "One would wish that the debate wasn't about the nutty stuff and would be about the real issues."

Three days later, 12 students, two instructors, three guides, two donors and a journalist journeyed north to Alaska to try and continue to learn about the "real issues." The next day after the flight to Fairbanks, the gang split into two groups of 10 and flew up and over the Brooks Range to one of two rivers. One group floated the Aichilik Rivers and the other group descended the Jago River. Both rivers start in the Brooks Range and flow north for roughly 40 miles across the coastal plain to the Beaufort Sea.

For the next eight days, the two groups got to discover the landscape they had been studying for the past week. They saw bears, foxes, caribou, tundra swans, voles, peregrine falcons, snowy owls and parasitic jaegers. They found small purple gentians, yellow cinquefoils, bluish harebells, pinkish valerians, white louseworts, low growing willow and white-topped cottongrass. They saw little if any signs of humans. They discovered a vast wide-open landscape where they could see for miles and miles. For each one, their adventure in the Refuge opened their eyes further to ideas and physical features that they hadn't considered in their classroom in Seattle.

After finishing their rafting adventure, everyone returned to Fairbanks where they continued to learn about the Refuge. From a historian, they learned that the Refuge has been the symbol of wilderness for more than 50 years. From a geologist, they learned how complicated the geology is and that no one really knows what is under the ground. From a biologist, they learned that previous studies on the caribou in the huge drilling fields of Prudhoe Bay don't provide the answers to what will happen on the coastal plain. From a politician, they learned that few Alaskans think that the coastal plain is wilderness, that no wildlife will be affected by drilling, and that oil in ANWR is critical to national security. From an activist, they learned just the opposite. From an Inupiat Eskimo, they learned the people of Kaktovik want to protect the 1002 area. From, a Gwich'in

Indian, they learned that the coastal plain is known as Ishik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit, "the sacred place where life began."

The class finally returned to Seattle, 12 days after flying into Fairbanks, and class began again on Monday. The next day they met with representatives from United States Senator Maria Cantwell's office, as well as a former aide to Senator Joe Lieberman, who led a successful effort to prevent drilling in the Refuge. Her discussion on how an individual could affect the political process kept the students riveted.

At the end of the course, both instructors, David Secord and Nate Mantua, said that this was the best and most intensive class they had ever taught. Most of the students expressed similar thoughts and also said that they felt privileged to learn the stories of the Refuge, to see the land and to make a decision informed by that knowledge.



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