

North Central College Students Study Environment in Ghana

A group of seven North Central College students spent part of December studying environmental issues in Ghana during a trip to Africa.

The students involved in the three-week study abroad program enrolled in a two-credit-hour course, "Development and the Environment in Ghana," part of North Central's year-old environmental studies program. The hands-on course included an introduction to Ghanaian history and culture, an investigation of the tension between development and environmental and social issues through the lens of gold mining and an examination of West Africa's slave history through a tour of culturally significant landmarks.

The trip and course were conceived by Kimberly Sluis, North Central's assistant dean for student life, and Martha Bohrer, professor of English and environmental studies. Sluis previously had lived in Ghana for three years with the Peace Corps.

Both Sluis and Bohrer had traveled internationally with students before, Sluis on a study abroad trip to Brazil and Argentina and Bohrer to Turkey and Tunisia. The trip was open to any student, and the course fee to cover air fare, food and lodging was \$1,895. The seven students who went were Anne Adamson, Ryan Koegel, Bridget Boynton, Aaron Roe, Kate Schmidt, Jose Riesco, and Andrea Devine.

As part of the planning and setting up process, Sluis traveled to Ghana for a three-week stay in July. By the time December term arrived, the entire trip had been planned out and an itinerary was established. For two days before the trip, Sluis and Bohrer met with the students to discuss Ghanaian history and culture as well as practice the Twi language. Then, on Dec. 4, after a nine-hour flight from JFK airport in New York, the group landed in Accra, the capital of Ghana. They spent the night there and were joined by their two drivers, making the party total 11. They traveled the next day in a 20-year-old Nissan van to Kumasi, a city of a million and a half people in the center of Ghana. During their five-day stay in Kumasi, the group traveled to a monkey sanctuary, visited an open air market and was able to observe a national election.



one can go to Africa and get an inside look at such amazing people's lives in their own setting."

The students also helped with the hard labor of harvesting plantains, cassava, and cocoa yam. For Schmidt, who had twice previously traveled to Africa, this was the most life-impacting part of the trip.



They next moved on to the town of Kenyasi in the Brong Ahafo region, the village where Sluis had lived while in the Peace Corps. Since then, Kenyasi has seen increased vehicle traffic due to new gold mining industry in the area, and for the students it was a great example of the repercussions of environmental change.

With the small size of their group, Bohrer said, "We were able to talk to people without being too conspicuous." Sluis's relationships with the villagers also richened the experience for the students. They were able to eat with families, develop relationships themselves and see everyday life in a growing Ghanaian village up close. This, for Kate Schmidt, '09, was a favorite activity. "Not every-

"It was such a unique experience that I really enjoyed. Yet, it is unsettling to know that people in developing countries spend so much time and energy doing activities to ensure basic survival while here at home we have so many unrealized blessings."

Also, while in Kenyasi, the group traveled to different gold mining sites, from the big American mining company to illegal and independent miners. This small-scale gold mining was the hardest and most significant part of the trip for Bohrer. They used the same methods of mining gold as was used in the California Gold Rush. "It was a devastating thing to see—women and children working with no protection, many times with mercury, as well as the destruction of the landscape."

After leaving Kenyasi, the group traveled to the coast for another five-day stay before returning to the capital for their flight home.