There is not much of the anxiety anymore,” Carter said, “and most are using the iPods as intended.”

The podcasts augment the participants’ seminar experiences and leadership principles. Class participants are also finding their own podcasts and sharing them with each other.

“We shared the idea with other states,” Strickland said, “and California and New York, among others were really interested.”

Strickland and Carter have been collecting data on how the WLI participants are using the iPods for professional development purposes.

“So far, I believe that providing iPods was a good idea, as we gathered data to show that people are using them to further learn about leadership topics and issues that will broaden and increase the scope of the leadership programming that we provide them,” Strickland said.
The Agricultural Education and Communication Department is developing a new program to raise awareness about public issues regarding agriculture and natural resources. The proposed Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources was started from an idea two years ago.

“We are developing the concept right now, putting together a business plan for it, promoting it and making stakeholders aware of the idea and its potential,” said Tracy Irani, an associate professor in the AEC department and the planning phase coordinator for the proposed center.

The vision of the proposed center is to be a focus for public issues education in the development of people, programs and policies that support and sustain the agricultural and natural resources industry in Florida, she said. “We plan to hold a public issues forum next fall on water conservation,” Irani said. “Sustainable practices might be an example of an issue we would address by bringing together all sides to dialogue and try to develop a consensus viewpoint.”

AEC doctoral student Angie Lindsey has been assisting Irani with the proposed center’s development. Lindsey has been doing the research and is involved in all planning stages of the program.

“I believe in the goals and the mission of the center,” Lindsey said. “I am and will continue to work hard to communicate the goals and mission to the public.”

Students in the University of Florida’s Agricultural Education and Communication Department are putting into action what they are learning in a course on experiential learning.

“Instead of learning strictly by lecture, the course promotes learning first by action, analysis then reflection,” said Brian Myers, an associate professor in the department, who taught the course during summer 2008.

Experiential learning is the concept that students learn best from experience. The course is designed so that students not only learn the theories involved in experiential learning, but also so they are actually engaging in experiential learning through course assignments.

“The first day, the students probably thought I was crazy because I had them making paper airplanes for 45 minutes,” Myers said. “However, they eventually saw my point and at the end of the 45 minutes, through experiential learning, their last paper airplane was better than the first.”

Throughout the semester the students continuously gained insight in the concept of experiential learning, he said, by participating in assignments ranging from judging a middle and high school level Florida FFA AgriScience Fair, to teaching a workshop to secondary school teachers in St. Augustine.

“My favorite part of the course was facilitating the workshop in St. Augustine to teachers. I enjoyed sharing what we learned and teaching how they, too, could implement the concept in their classrooms,” said Anna Warner, a master’s student in the course.

As a class, the students traveled to Orlando and judged the entries at the AgriScience Fair. The purpose of this project-based assignment was to see how experiential learning aided in the production of the projects.

“I knew that teaching the class in this format, and requiring out-of-class trips and assignments would either be really cool or a train wreck,” Myers said. “I received good feedback, and the students seemed to learn a lot.”

The course is applicable because much of school-based agricultural education and extension, specifically 4H, is taught based on experiential learning, Myers said.

The course is offered every other summer and has been taught twice prior to summer 2008. The course objective is not only to make sure students know the theory, but also that they know how to use it, Myers said.

The hands-on activities made the course fun and offered a fun environment, Warner said.

“For the students, some things went well and others didn’t, but they improved. This is what experiential learning is all about,” Myers said.
Kayaking Florida’s natural wonders
By Cristy Groce

After moving to Florida from her home in Colorado, Amy Harder and her husband Bret sought out kayaking to replace skiing and hiking. Harder is an assistant professor teaching extension education in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.

“Working as an extension educator allows me to be myself due to the variety of activities associated with it, including opportunities to be outside of the office,” she said.

“We’re not thrill seekers, but we would rather be outdoors on any given day,” Harder said.

Harder lived in Colorado for about 10 years and said she misses the mountains. She was used to going on weekend trips with her husband and dogs to places in the wilderness where no one was around for miles.

“Seeing manatees and uncommon birds we haven’t seen before while kayaking is especially great because it feels like it’s our experience, like we’re the only ones who get to see this, and that’s pretty cool,” Harder said.

She said she searched online for someone selling kayaks and finally found a “his and hers set.”

“Once you buy the kayaks, which can be pricey, all the rivers, wetlands, streams, and lakes are free to explore,” she said.

The couple’s first kayaking trip in Florida was paddling down the Rainbow River. Harder said she also enjoys the Ocklawaha River, which can entail up to six hours of hard paddling.

On several of her trips paddling on the Silver River, she has seen monkeys in the trees and alligators resting on logs, she said.

“Kayaking on the rivers makes you feel like you’re seeing what Florida must have been like before everyone came in and built Disney World,” Harder said.

She enjoys the seclusion of kayaking, especially in the less crowded months, she said. Harder and her husband have gone kayaking about every weekend in some months but less in the summer when it can get crowded.

“The great thing about kayaking is that it’s good exercise, and it’s a neat opportunity to see something unique every time you go,” she said.

Harder encourages everyone to explore what Florida has to offer outside of Gainesville.

“You don’t have to drive too far and it’s a nice change of pace,” Harder said.

The art of avian observation
By Steven Steiger

In the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, one professor practices an unusual, if not obscure, hobby with uncanny resolve, while another instructor does so more casually.

Glenn Israel, a professor of extension education and leadership, has the distinction of being an avid “birder,” which is someone who beholds avian wildlife in its natural environment in the hope of attaining a greater knowledge of birds and their specific behavioral patterns.

“It’s an activity that allows you to get outdoors, enjoy what you see and perceive nature in its purest form,” Israel said.

Israel first became interested in bird watching as a boy growing up in New England. A trip to nearby Great Bay, N.H., provided him with the opportunity to observe various species of birds in their natural habitat.

“This experience, along with the fact that my mother was also a birding enthusiast, inspired me to take up this activity during my free time,” he said.

Israel regularly goes to Paynes Prairie, a state preserve south of Gainesville, for his avian adventures and keeps a “life list,” which is a record of all the birds he has seen over the years.

“I try to get out whenever I can, on the weekends especially,” Israel said. “Once there, I try to identify the birds I see or only hear, while taking a moment to appreciate the beauty of nature.”

For Israel, the most invigorating part of bird watching is seeing whether birds will do something spontaneous or unexpected.

“The idea that you never know what you’re going to see from them is fascinating,” he said. “You will occasionally witness them doing something new, which is why birds are so intriguing. It’s all a matter of being in the right place at the right time.”

Amy Harder, an assistant professor of extension education in the AEC department and colleague of Israel, is also an observer of birds, albeit to a lesser extent.

“Whenever I go kayaking with my husband, I take pictures of wildlife as much as I can, particularly birds because they’re fun to photograph,” said Harder.

More of a passive bird watcher than Israel, Harder is motivated by curiosity and primarily interested in the variety native to the Sunshine State.

“It’s really neat to see the diversity of Florida wildlife. Since I’m from outside of Chicago, just seeing the many kinds of birds, like the cranes, storks and water birds, makes me realize the magnitude of birds’ presence in nature,” Harder said.
Love is in the air for students and staff in the Agricultural Education and Communication Department.

Jodi Modica, the AEC department’s academic support services coordinator and a graduate of the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and her husband James were married in St. Augustine, Fla., in July.

“I met James through mutual friends who were members of the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity when I was a senior at UF,” Modica said.

Four and a half years later, they walked down the aisle in the chapel of the Lightner Museum.

Graduate student Christy Windham is making plans for her May wedding to fiance Elio Chiarelli, a recent graduate of the AEC master’s program. Windham met Chiarelli through FFA, while she was serving as a Mississippi state officer and he was serving as a national officer.

“We started dating eight months after we met in 2002, and he proposed to me this August while we were backpacking through Europe with friends,” Windham said. “It was very sweet; we were on a gondola ride in Venice when he proposed, and we decided not to call our family for a couple of days just so we could enjoy touring the city and knowing that we were the only ones who knew for the time being.”

Windham and Chiarelli will be married in Asheville, N.C., at the historic Grove Park Inn on May 23, 2009.

Perhaps the most interesting department-related romance is between undergraduate students Seth Rogers and Kati McWaters. Rogers and McWaters met in Dr. Ricky Telg’s class in fall 2007 during their first semester at UF.

“Actually, our first date was on Kati’s birthday on Oct. 5,” Rogers said. “She invited me to eat out at a Japanese steakhouse with all of her friends.”

Rogers and McWaters dated for seven months before Rogers proposed to her beneath UF’s Century Tower.

“I wanted the proposal to be memorable, so I planned it around things we saw every day like Krispy Kreme and Century Tower,” Rogers said.

He even got Telg in on the surprise. To get McWaters to come back to campus, Telg sent her and e-mail asking her to come to his office for a phony meeting. Before the meeting, Rogers and McWaters needed to stop by Krispy Kreme to pick up snacks for a group function they would be attending later that evening.

McWaters didn’t know that Rogers had already arranged to have her favorite donuts set aside with a note written inside the box lid. When they arrived, McWaters complicated the plan by asking for the mini-sized donuts instead of her usual order. When the cashier realized that Rogers’ order had already been prepared, she refused to give McWaters the mini-donuts and instead handed her the box that had already been prepared.

“She talked about that cashier all the way to campus,” Rogers said. “She could not believe that the lady had just told her, ‘No.’”

When the couple arrived on campus, Rogers asked McWaters to view a nice location that he had videotaped earlier outside of Century Tower.

“I put her right in front of the tower and told her I needed to tie my shoe. I handed her the donut box with ‘WILL YOU MARRY ME’ written on the inside cover and bent down to get the ring ready. While I was down there, I asked her to please hand me a donut so she would open the box and read the message, but right after I asked her to do it, I realized that there was a very good chance she would tell me to ‘Get it yourself,’” Rogers said with a laugh.

Other AEC students planning weddings include Katelyn Crow and Kyle Landrum, two graduate students in the agricultural leadership master’s program who will wed in August 2009, and Lauren Dillard, who graduated Spring 2009 with a master’s in agricultural education. Lauren will marry Will Butler, a fellow UF graduate in October 2009.
The Agricultural Education and Communication Department has more going on than meets the eye. The AEC social committee plans monthly activities that are popular among faculty, staff and graduate students. The goal of the social committee is to bring together faculty, staff and graduate students.

The committee formed in spring 2007 under the belief that meeting people outside work builds trust and makes a highly effective team.

“It contributes to the overall success of the department,” said Hannah Carter, an assistant professor in the AEC department and social committee member.

The committee is comprised of three faculty members, one staff member and one graduate student. Carter said the committee is unique because each member is a volunteer; no one is appointed.

One of the events held is a monthly luncheon, where faculty, staff and graduate students walk across University Avenue to a restaurant and have lunch. Another event is the welcome back dinner at Gator’s Dockside in the fall.

The most popular event is the monthly birthday cake, said Holly O’Ferrell, AEC department administrative assistant and a founding member of the committee. The social committee also tries to incorporate families by having a Thanksgiving celebration and Christmas party where family members are welcome.

“We want to have a family-type atmosphere in AEC,” Carter said.

O’Ferrell said attendance varies from event to event, but the after hours events are most successful. Around 30 people attend the events.

“We receive a lot of compliments on how close the department is,” O’Ferrell said.

Girls just want to have fun, and that is exactly what Agricultural Education and Communication graduate student Anna Warner is doing.

Warner started taking salsa dance lessons at Okito America at the end of May 2008 and has been enjoying it ever since.

“It’s my release; it’s the thing I look forward to the most during the week,” Warner said.

Salsa dancing releases the same endorphins that exercising does, Warner said.

“It doesn’t feel like exercising, and you’re learning a skill at the same time. It’s fun,” Warner said.

As a graduate student and new mom to her puppy, Mia, Warner knows the importance of taking time out for yourself.

“Especially working on your master’s degree and research, it’s so easy to become focused on just that and put all your time in it,” she said.

It’s not healthy for students to spend all of their time focused on just one thing, Warner said. It’s a good idea to have an outlet, and salsa has been great for her.

“If I’m working all day, I can say, ‘I gotta be done by 7:30 tonight so I can make it to salsa,’” Warner said. “It makes me make time for myself.”

“Each country has its own version of salsa dancing,” she said. “I’m learning the Cuban version of salsa dancing.”

A spinning salsa dance move called Enrosca is one of Warner’s favorites.

“It took me forever to learn it,” Warner said. “I like it so much now, because I feel successful every time I do it.”

A dance that Warner also enjoys is called the Rueda de Casina. The dance is very similar to a square dance where the couples stand in a large circle and someone will call out moves to the participants.

“It’s so much fun,” she said. “It gives you experience practicing the different moves; keeps it lively.”
AEC spotlight: awards

Jack L. Fry Graduate Teaching Award
Karen Cannon

CALS Alumni and Friends Leadership Award: Amie Taylor

Jimmy Cheek Graduate Medal of Excellence: Sebastian Galindo-Gonzales

Larry Connor Medal of Excellence Finalist
Kelvin Moreno

2009 University of Florida Hall of Fame-Kelvin Moreno

Superior Accomplishment Award, Administrative/Professional
Jodi Modica

Livestock Publication Council Critique Contest Cover Design Winner
Cristy Groce

North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture

NACTA Teacher Fellow: Tracy Irani, Brian Myers, Grady Roberts

NACTA Graduate Student Teaching Award: Andrew Thoron

Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Agricultural Communication Section

Outstanding Innovative Poster:
Katie Abrams & Lisa Hightower

American Association for Agricultural Education, Southern Region

Outstanding Innovative Poster:
Kirby Barrick, Mohammed Samy, Michael Gunderson, & Andrew Thoron

Jodi Modica received the 2009 Administrative and Professional Superior Accomplishment Award for the UF/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. Modica was one of 23 IFAS award recipients. Interim senior vice president for agriculture and natural resources Larry Arrington presents Modica with her award.

Doctoral student Karen Cannon received the 2009 Jack L. Fry Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the UF Graduate Student Teaching Award. The UF Graduate Student Teaching Award is presented to only 20 graduate students campus-wide. This is the third year in a row that a doctoral student in the AEC Department has won the Fry Teaching Award and a UF Graduate Student Teaching Award.

Outstanding Innovative Poster 1st Runner-Up:
Anna Warner & Andrew Thoron

Outstanding Research Presentation – Graduate Student:
Andrew Thoron & Brian Myers

Outstanding Research Presentation 1st Runner-Up – Faculty:
Amy Harder, Lex Lamm, & Robert Strong

Outstanding Research Presentation 2nd Runner-Up – Graduate Student:
Andrew Thoron & Brian Myers

Congratulations to all 2009 Alpha Tau Alpha inductees!
Twenty-eight students in an Agricultural Communication and Education course are in the process of producing promotional videos for undergraduate programs offered in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The videos will be used as recruitment tools for each department in CALS to promote the departments’ undergraduate programs to high school and community college students and will be used on the departmental Web sites.

“The idea to produce the videos stemmed from a conversation I had with Jodi Modica at the Gator Encounter event in April,” said Ricky Telg, who teaches the Digital Media Production in Agricultural and Life Sciences class.

Gator Encounter is an event held at the Reitz Union for students interested in attending the college.

“Jodi and I noticed that attendance was light,” Telg said. “We thought it might be due to the higher gas prices in April (2008).”

Telg and Modica questioned whether there was a better way to get word out about the college’s programs. Modica informed Telg about a Web site that housed pictures and video clips and provided prospective students with a virtual recruitment experience.

With his expertise in video production, Telg knew he could help the situation by producing a promotional video for each department within the college and posting it on the Web for students wanting to know more about the opportunities in CALS.

Telg talked with Charlotte Emerson, CALS’ director of student development and recruitment, about the possibility of students in his digital media production course producing brief departmental videos for the college. Production started in the fall of 2008.

Students in groups of three picked one of eight departments to cover. Each group was provided with a contact name from the department and was sent out to begin collecting information to be included in the videos.

“Our contact person tells us what she expects to see in the video. She has given us names of people to interview, places to shoot, and even some of the old recruitment tools used in the department to give us an idea of what she wants,” said Jackie Eager, one of the 28 students involved in production.

“When we’re finished, she expects to see a video that covers everything from the majors offered to the student lifestyle, curriculum, opportunities for scholarships and information on the organizations and activities affiliated with the department.”

Students in Telg’s digital media production course completed the first round of videos in the fall 2008 semester. Response from departmental contacts has been positive.

“I was very impressed,” said Sylvia King, the animal sciences department’s student services coordinator. “The three students I worked with were extremely professional, timely and creative. It was a joy working with them.”

“I was quite impressed with the quality of the production,” said Kenneth Buhr, plant science-agronomy’s undergraduate coordinator. “The video exceeded my expectations.”

The videos will be posted on the departments’ Web sites. At a rate of about eight videos a year, the project should take two to three years to complete.