

AEC Review

Spring 2010

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Agricultural Education Program Fully Approved for National Accreditation

By Andrea Davis

Celebrations are in order for the AEC department's agricultural education program as it has recently received a full approval for national accreditation by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Florida Department of



Education (DOE). The agricultural education program, considered an affiliate program of the College of Education, goes through the accreditation process every seven years and is reviewed by both

NCATE and DOE. However, it is very difficult to achieve a full approval for accreditation, said Brian Myers, associate professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.

"This rarely happens," Myers said. "We are the only fully approved, accredited agricultural education program in the state. This is a huge accomplishment for us."

Specific standards must be met to receive NCATE's full approval. Instructors must document that students are effectively learning the material that is taught to them by recording student work in an "electronic container" that is shown to the NCATE and DOE reviewers, Myers said.

Instructors must document whether the standard is unmet, met or met with weakness by the student, he said.

Students, faculty and staff are heavily involved in the accreditation process, as well, said AEC associate professor Grady Roberts.

"Everyone from professors, undergraduate and graduate students, AEC department chair Dr. Ed Osborne and even alumni of the program are interviewed by the NCATE and DOE reviewers," Roberts said.

The accreditation process is intense, Myers said, as it is becoming increasingly more

difficult to get accredited and particularly, to achieve a full approval.

"The program coordinators for all teacher education programs on campus met once every two weeks for over two-and-a-half years to prepare for each upcoming accreditation," Myers said. "There's a lot to do in order to be ready for when the reviewers come here to visit."

As a result of this hard work and dedication by the faculty and staff in the program, the recent accreditation visit by the NCATE and DOE reviewers went smoothly, Myers said.

"Not only did we receive a full approval to be accredited, but reviewers were also all very impressed with our program and how organized we are here," he said.

The agricultural education program can thank the faculty and staff of the College of Education for helping them in achieving some of this success, Myers said.

"As an affiliate of the College of Education, we, in the agricultural education program, have an excellent working relationship with them," he said. "There are lots of great people over there who are always very helpful to us."

Due to the agricultural education program's recent NCATE accreditation, all graduates from this specialization are automatically eligible for both NCATE and DOE certification.

In addition, the program is able to certify its students at a Master of Science level, if they choose to pursue this degree in the graduate program, he said.

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AEC Enrollment Skyrockets

By Ryan Dautel

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication has more than doubled its enrollment in less than five years.

In fall 2005, the total undergraduate enrollment was 64, and the total graduate enrollment was 59. In the spring of 2010, the undergraduate enrollment reached 138, and graduate enrollment is up to 64.

“We identified a goal of increasing the undergraduate program’s enrollment to 100 students about five or six years ago, but this spring we just blew by that like a sprint race,” said AEC department chair Ed Osborne.

The AEC department, comprised of both graduate and undergraduate programs, contains specific specializations within its programs. The two undergraduate specializations are agricultural education and communication and leadership development (CLD). The four graduate specializations are agricultural communication, agricultural education, extension education and leadership

development.

Undergraduate coordinator Ricky Telg attributes some of the department’s recruitment success to its unique curriculum and ability to connect people with agriculture.

“Word is getting out about the quality and the content of our program,” Telg said. “Students who are drawn to social sciences want to work with people as an educator, leader or communicator, and if you look at majors in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, or at UF in general, our program is the only one of its kind. We connect agriculture and people.”

The CLD specialization, which has seen the greatest increase in enrollment, was created to provide students with a program that blended both agricultural communication and leadership education into one field of study. Since its start in 2006, the specialization has grown substantially and is now seeing an increase in applicants from nonagricultural backgrounds as well.

“I don’t think that’s necessarily a

bad thing,” Telg said. “If part of our responsibility is to help students become informed about agricultural issues, and they become advocates for agriculture, then we have done a good job in promoting agricultural understanding and literacy.”

The second largest enrollment surge occurred off campus in the agricultural education specialization. The department’s Plant City campus at the Gulf Coast Research and Education Center allows students living near Plant City to earn a bachelor’s degree from the University of Florida.

AEC graduate coordinator Brian Myers attributes some of the agricultural education specialization’s success to increased networking and recruitment.

“The increase in enrollment is a direct result of an intentional recruitment program put in place about six years ago,” Myers said. “Since then, we have really focused on building relationships with high school agriculture teachers and giving them the tools they need to get the word out about our program.”

Steering Committee Helps Guide New Public Issues Center

By Rusty Hartline

A new program at the University of Florida is designed to inform the public about issues related to agriculture and natural resources.

The Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources was formed with the goal of improving understanding of public policymakers’ perceptions, opinions and intentions with respect to agriculture and natural resources.

In July 2009, a group of 25 stakeholders, representing the agriculture and natural resource industries, University of Florida faculty and agricultural groups, met for the center’s first steering committee. These individuals were brought in to hear their thoughts and ideas about the direction of the center.

Angie Lindsey, a graduate student assisting with the center, said, “We came to a point in our planning for the center where it was time to find out from the people the program is focused on, what needs or concerns are there about the industry. We brought together what we were thinking and the input from the committee members to set a foundation to look forward to.”

Interim Senior Vice President for

Agriculture and Natural Resources Larry Arrington welcomed the committee members and attendees to the meeting, stressing the importance of the center’s

“The committee pointed out there was a lack of civic engagement in the agriculture industry.” Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources coordinator Christy Chiarelli

mission to the university, the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The purpose of gathering these individuals was to gain feedback and concerns about the direction agriculture and natural resources are going in the future and ways to inform the public. Agricultural Education and Communication associate professor Nicole Stedman helped guide discussions to focus ideas on the center.

Center coordinator Christy Chiarelli said, “The committee pointed out there was a lack of civic engagement in the

agriculture industry and the industry lacks support because the public doesn’t understand.”

The center is continuing to develop programs and efforts designed to help educate the public by first helping industry professionals develop strategies to implement a plan to ensure that education is presented in the correct way.

The center’s Web site (www.centerpie.com) continues to stay current with trends and issues facing the agriculture industry, Lindsey said.



The Center for Public Issues Education
IN AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Mary Rodriguez: An Adventurous Agriculturist

By Jaime Spivey

When you combine hydrogen and oxygen, you get water. When you combine agriculture and adventure, you get Mary Rodriguez.

And combining agriculture and adventure is just what she did in Costa Rica.

As an agricultural education master's student, Rodriguez spent the summer and fall of 2009 in Costa Rica. She served as a teaching and research assistant training 17 entrepreneurs from four universities in the humid tropics. Students from the University of Florida, Purdue University, North Carolina State University and Texas A&M University participated in the three-week study abroad program.

The program was funded by an education grant. Agricultural Education and Communication associate professors Tracy Irani and Grady Roberts contributed to the development of the curriculum, Rodriguez said.

The summer abroad program ended in July 2009; however, Rodriguez stayed behind in Costa Rica. At the end of the summer, Costa Rica's EARTH University was so impressed with Rodriguez's work she was invited to stay and serve as the program coordinator for the Forestry in the Humid Tropics course from Cal Poly University. She excitedly accepted.

The course professor handed Rodriguez the syllabus, and she did the rest. With only the topics in hand, she planned and implemented the course. The work she did

served as the foundation for her master's thesis.

"I stayed from July to December for personal and professional development," Rodriguez said. "I thought it was awesome to be a program coordinator for agricultural study abroad programs."

Rodriguez's thesis originally was to gauge student perceptions of culture and to see the effect study abroad programs had on their perceptions. However, while in Costa Rica, her thesis research changed to best practices for study abroad programs.

"The type I focused on was a short term study abroad which can be anywhere from one week to six weeks," Rodriguez said.

Her thesis outlines three different time periods for a study abroad program: before the study abroad experience, during the experience and after.

In the course she coordinated, Rodriguez included both reflection sessions and journaling. She wrote a journal every day that she studied abroad in Australia in 2002 and still goes back and looks at it. Her journal allows her to continue her learning after the experience's end, which is why she implemented journaling in the course.

"Reflection is probably the main thing," Rodriguez said. "Keeping a journal is the best thing students can do."

Rodriguez said her research is unique because it is international.

"I didn't just research best practices for study abroad programs from home," she

said. "Coordinating and implementing the study abroad programs in Costa Rica gave me the opportunity to learn alongside my students what practices worked best."

Rodriguez recently defended her thesis and is on her way to graduating with a master's degree in agricultural education with an emphasis in international agriculture.

"She's going to do a lot of interesting things," Roberts said, "whether it be working at a university doing international work or coming back for a Ph.D."



Mary Rodriguez rode for 4 1/2 hours touring the Maleku Indigenous Reserve in Costa Rica. Rodriguez's first agricultural experience was with horses and she still enjoys them today. Horseback riding, bridge jumping and flying down a zipline through the forest canopy are just a few things Rodriguez did to satisfy her adventurous side while in Costa Rica.

AEC Grad Jenkins Applies Leadership to Public Relations

By Ariana Smith

Former Gator and department Alumna Nicole Jenkins receives the most satisfaction in working for a major advertising company by being able to help the company succeed by applying her leadership and interpersonal skills.

Jenkins, who graduated with a specialization in agricultural communication in 1997, moved to Jacksonville in 2005 when she responded to a newspaper ad for an open position at St. John & Partners, a Jacksonville-based advertising company, whose clientele includes Ford, the Florida Lottery, Winn-Dixie and Zaxby's.

Jenkins serves as the lead public relations account manager for Zaxby's. Since starting at SJ&P, Jenkins has had two of her news stories featured in the business sections of the Florida Times-Union and the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

Jenkins' experience in public relations, stemming from time spent working as a public relations assistant with the Florida

Strawberry Festival, helped to prepare her for her current position. She also worked with Crystal Cruises as an on-board guest loyalty program manager and on-board print materials producer. Jenkins said that her work with the cruise line provided her with valuable communication skills.

"I've learned how to treat people and make people feel comfortable and welcome," Jenkins said. "If I'm working with clients, I make them feel welcome in our office and comfortable with bringing their business problems to me to help solve."

The transition to SJ&P did come with a few adjustments for Jenkins, however. She had to become familiar with the agency culture: interacting with the multiple departments within the agency, recording time spent with clients for billing purposes and documenting time spent on individual assignments.

Jenkins has also experienced more team work and leadership roles at SJ&P. SJ&P

employees are expected not only to provide satisfactory work, but also to provide the solutions to problems without having to be micromanaged, Jenkins said.

"My boss doesn't want to make the decisions for me," Jenkins said. "He wants me to find the facts and recommend what action we should take moving forward."



Nicole Jenkins (left) with NFL star Joe Theismann while managing a Habitat for Humanity event for client Winn-Dixie.

UF Collegiate Farm Bureau Members Inspired to Advocate for Agriculture

By Carly Barnes

Seven representatives of the University of Florida Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter were motivated to advocate for agriculture and the 2010 Young Farmers and Ranchers leadership conference themed “Stand Up, Speak Out” in February in Tulsa, Okla.

The American Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers program offers leadership development opportunities to 18- to 35-year olds in order to develop strong



University of Florida Collegiate Farm Bureau members (left to right) Mike Rogalsky, Sarah Burlison and Ashley Young studied the conference program to decide which breakout sessions would be most beneficial to them as college students and agriculturists.

voices for the agriculture industry. Collegiate Farm Bureau is a division within the YF&R program that provides college students with an opportunity to stay involved with Farm Bureau during their college years, said UF Collegiate Farm Bureau member Michael Rogalsky.

“The national Young Farmers and Ranchers conference gave our fairly new Collegiate Farm Bureau chapter the

opportunity to network with some of the country’s best to exchange ideas to make our chapter even better than it already is,” Rogalsky said. “Our chapter was established in 2008, so it’s important for us to continue to develop young leaders and supporters for agriculture to advance our chapter into the future.”

Exchanging ideas is a main focus of the conference, with activities such as the Collegiate Discussion Meet where students compete in a mock committee discussion and a breakout session for a wild card issue discussion. Having the opportunity to network with other farmers and ranchers from across the country to discuss important issues facing agriculture allows YF&R members to share their stories, solve problems and unite on issues with a common voice for agriculture, said UF Collegiate Farm Bureau member and Agricultural Education and Communication student Arielle Claude.

“It was interesting to see that no matter what type of agriculture members were involved in, everyone seemed to have common problems that needed to be talked about and discussed as a group,” Claude said.

The conference and session speakers provided insight to major skills and issues that YF&R members need to focus on, such as how to portray agriculture in a positive light when interviewed by the media, how to work together in difficult situations and how to create a positive perception of agriculture, Claude said.

Chris Chinn, a Missouri hog farmer and advocate for agriculture, presented a session on how farmers and ranchers can use social

media to tell their story in agriculture in order to portray their industry in a positive way to the media and combat organizations that attack farms and ranches, Claude said.

“If we used social media, we can reach out to the people who live in the cities and we can reach out to our urban cousins and help them understand what we do on a daily basis on our farms and ranches,” Chinn said in her address to the conference attendees during a general session. “With the average consumer being three generations removed from the farm, they don’t know a farmer they can talk to, and that’s why social media is so important for each one of us to use.”

Other highlights of the conference were hearing from American Farm Bureau president Bob Stallman on the importance of advocating agriculture and from keynote speaker Matt Roloff of the television show “Little People, Big World” on using public outreach and marketing strategies to increase an operation’s bottom line, as well as his personal story. Conference attendees also had the opportunity to tour agricultural operations in the Tulsa area, Claude said.

“I was very grateful to have the opportunity to be surrounded and inspired by so many respectable agriculturists,” Claude said. “I was exposed to the importance of being an advocate for agriculture through the media, allowing me to make connections back home as a student at the University of Florida studying agricultural communication and leadership development to become a future agriculture communicator and advocate for the industry.”

AEC Grad Lives Out Her Passion for Ag & Writing

By Jaime Spivey

A Department of Agricultural Education and Communication graduate is working in her 10th year as the editor of the Peanut Grower magazine. A decade has passed and times have changed, but Amanda Huber’s occupation still includes two of her passions: agriculture and writing.

Unlike the traditional 9-to-5 workdays of other occupations, Huber makes her own schedule. One Grower Publishing Co. has its office in Memphis, Tenn. However, Huber works strictly from her home. This allows her to be a stay-at-home mom, while having a career, although she admits this is sometimes a challenge.

“You have to be disciplined,” Huber said. “Some weeks I work 20 hours, and some weeks I work 60.”

Huber’s calendar is always full. Her days are filled with household chores, parenting and her responsibilities as an editor.

Nevertheless, this is a perk of her job that she enjoys.

“A normal day is I don’t have a normal day,” she said.

As editor, Huber is responsible for 100 percent of the writing in the Peanut Grower magazine. This entails gathering all information needed to write the articles. She contacts contributing writers through e-mail and phone interviews.

In addition, she travels to tours and field days and attends various meetings. The field is where she interacts with researchers discussing new varieties and new techniques that may be beneficial to her readers.

“When you’re editor, you are going to do more than your job,” Huber said.

Huber’s experience in the peanut industry began in 1992 when she served as executive director of the Florida Peanut Producers

Association. This experience, along with two bachelor’s degrees in agronomy and agricultural education and communication, with a specialization in agricultural communication, gave her a knowledge and understanding of the industry. In 2002, she also completed a master’s degree in agricultural communication.



Amanda Huber, graduate of the University of Florida’s Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, is editor of The Peanut Grower Magazine.

AEC Welcomes New Employees

By Quisto Settle

Sebastian Galindo

While not a newcomer to the department, Sebastian Galindo has begun a new role in the department, transitioning from graduate student to research associate.

Galindo, a 2009 doctoral graduate in Extension education, is teaching a new undergraduate course which he developed: Leading Personal and Organizational Change. Galindo



Sebastian Galindo

has worked to adapt the class to better

meet the students' needs as the course has progressed through the semester.

The other aspect of his role in the department is research. Galindo has been working with faculty in and outside of the department on writing grants, with a primary focus on the evaluation components of research projects.

He is collaborating with the Millennium Village Project by trying to get volunteers from UF to implement an agricultural component in addition to the health programs that are in place.

Galindo is not new to the department. He has been with the department since 2005 and at UF since 2002. Originally on track for a doctorate in animal sciences, the placement of former AEC faculty member

Nick Place on his committee served to spark Galindo's interest in Extension.

Galindo said he knew he had to choose between a doctorate in animal sciences or Extension, so after finishing up a master's degree in animal sciences, Galindo began his doctorate in Extension.

"I would like to get a tenure-track position and have a nice combination of research, teaching and extension," Galindo said.

He is collaborating with counterparts in Mexico and at the University of Kentucky trying to get funding to implement training for extension agents in Mexico based on recommendations from his dissertation.

Meredith Cochie

Meredith Cochie began her role in July as coordinator of the Scientific Thinking and Educational Partnership (STEP) program, where she helps faculty and students translate science to the public.

Cochie works with faculty across campus on grant proposals, particularly on integrating public outreach and "broad impact" into their research. She also coordinates the production of videos, Web sites and social media as a part of the STEP program.

But Cochie's work goes beyond the STEP program. She teaches two courses for the College of Journalism and Communications: JOU 1100: Introduction to Journalism and MMC 2604: Mass Media

and You. The introductory course has been an enjoyment of Cochie's.

"It's refreshing," she said. "Kids



Meredith Cochie

summer high school journalism camp. And how does she keep them inspired for

are super-excited about journalism."

Her work with aspiring journalists doesn't stop with college students. She's also in charge of the University of Florida's

journalistic opportunities when traditional journalism is on the decline?

"They do have opportunity; it's just different," Cochie said. "Every company out there is going to be its own media outlet."

Prior to beginning with the department, Cochie worked in public relations and publications for the University of Florida Foundation, which serves to raise funds for the university.

Then she heard about the STEP opening, which she said gave her the opportunity to use new media skills with new groups of people.

"This department has opened my eyes to so many different things going on in the world," Cochie said. "I love what I do."

Shannon Noble

After taking a break from teaching for "mom time," Shannon Noble has gotten back into education as a new employee in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication.

Noble has taken on a two-part role in the department. She works with Grady Roberts on research projects and teaches a section of AEE 3033c: Research and Business Writing in Agricultural and Life Sciences.

"I've never taught at the college level," Nobel said. "It's a different perspective of education."

Noble taught for eight years at the secondary level. The first two years were as an agriculture teacher and the other six were as a science teacher.

In her other departmental role, Noble

assists Roberts in the coordination of research. This includes working on a three-year U.S. Department of Agriculture grant titled "Teaching Locally, Engaging Globally."

"I like the fact that I came in just as the grant was getting started," she said. "It's a grant with a global perspective."

Noble has four children in different school levels: one in preschool, one in elementary, one in middle school and one in high school.

"My hobbies are keeping up with my kids' hobbies," Noble said.

This includes learning about lacrosse, basketball, football, and track and field as her children have started taking up the sports.



Shannon Noble

Freit Promotes Major Restaurant Chain

By Sam Holmes

A 2001 graduate of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication has been busy for almost a decade promoting a restaurant chain that prides itself in being “delightfully tacky yet unrefined.”

Jenelle Freit is the outside sales manager for Hooters restaurants in regions of Florida, Alabama and Mississippi. Freit started as a waitress for Hooters locations in Daytona when she was an agricultural communication undergraduate.

Since then, she has been promoted to her current position where she coordinates advertising, marketing and promotions in her regions. For example, Freit gears up for football playoffs by reaching out to local fan groups while utilizing the Hooters national campaign.

“Every day is completely different,” she said. “I go from meeting international franchisees, to researching community demographics, to developing campaigns for sports. I also really enjoy our local community efforts and helping charities.”

Working in the community is one of the benefits of working for Hooters, she said.

“Besides being fun, the company contributes so much to the community,

including huge fundraising for breast cancer research,” Freit said. “The company values its employees and offers tremendous opportunities.”

She has worked for Hooters for 11 years and says that what she learned as an agricultural communications student has helped her with her current position.

“The communications basics, such as journalism writing, intercultural communications and mostly on-the-job development through internships, has helped me a lot,” she said. “The fundamentals have been the most important resource at any position or industry I’ve been in.”

Freit says it’s important to intern before graduating from college. Freit interned with UF’s Harn Museum of Art.

“Never underestimate the importance of internships,” she said. “Also, challenge yourself to learn something from every job or internship because it will be used in whatever industry you choose to work in.”

Freit has lived in Daytona Beach since graduation and has been happily married for eight years to her husband Rob. They have three dogs and enjoy

riding their Harley motorcycle, as well as going to the beach and watching Gator football.



Hooters’ outside sales manager Jenelle Freit (far right), a graduate of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, poses with members of Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow at the Hooters restaurant in Daytona.

ATA Sponsors Agriculture Issues Forum

By Avery Sams

Earlier this semester, the second annual Agricultural Issues Forum was held to educate students on agricultural problems they may face as they enter the workforce. The event was hosted by Alpha Tau Alpha (ATA), the agricultural education and communication honors society, and Florida Farm Bureau.

“We were pleased with the quality of the information presented at the second annual event” said Lauri Baker, ATA president and event emcee. “This is something the ATA officers and Dr. (Ed) Osborne (AEC department chair) would like to see continue in the future, since issues in agriculture today are extremely important as students

graduate and enter the workforce.”

Speakers included Frankie Hall, director of Ag Policy for Florida Farm Bureau; Clay Archey, field representative in Animal Nutrition for Archer Daniels Midland; Christy Chiarelli, coordinator for UF’s Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources; and Adam Basford, national affairs coordinator for Ag Policy for Florida Farm Bureau.

Although topics ranged from water quality to cap and trade to the comprehensive energy policy, the common theme of public education emerged. Speakers said it is students’ responsibility to become educated on these topics and, in

turn, use the skills they are learning at the University of Florida to better communicate these issues to the public.

“This may be the only place some students are exposed to policy that directly affects the future of their industry,” Baker said. “While the first year was broader in topic coverings, this year was focused specifically on the top issues affecting agriculturalist today. I think this option worked better and allowed for more focused discussion. In future programs we would like to see the same enthusiasm for these issues and active discussion like we saw at this year’s event.”



Members of Collegiate FFA traveled to Indianapolis for the National FFA Convention in October. Collegiate FFA members participated in a variety of events, including competitions, FFA’s large exposition and a career fair.

Adam Basford: From the Farm to Farm Bureau

By Carly Barnes

After experiencing the direct effect of poor legislation on his family's hog operation, one Department of Agricultural Education and Communication graduate took an active role in shaping the future of the agriculture industry.



Adam Basford, Florida Farm Bureau Federation National Affairs Coordinator.

Adam Basford's roots run deep in agriculture, as his family has been farming in Jackson County, Fla., since the 1840s. A seventh-generation agriculturalist, Basford grew up working on his family's peanut and hog farm, doing everything from working pigs to driving tractors.

"Growing up I always thought that I would end up back on the farm," Basford said. "Having that background and continuing that on to future generations was important to me."

In 2002, the future of the Basfords' family farm was changed forever when Florida voters passed Florida Amendment 10, outlawing the use of gestation crates on hog farms. The enactment of this amendment changed production practices for hog farmers in Florida, forcing the Basford family out of swine production, he said.

The disconnection between the public, government and agriculture is what inspired Basford to be an advocate for the agriculture industry, he said.

Basford was pursuing a bachelor's in organizational communication with minors in political science and leadership from the University of West Florida during the time of the 2002 amendment. He also graduated from the University of Florida with a master's degree in agricultural communication in 2004, with the idea that he would be advocating for agriculture, he said.

Basford had worked with the public relations division of the Florida Farm Bureau Federation for about a year during his master's program, and found the organization to be a perfect fit after graduation, he said.

He began working as the assistant director of agricultural policy that summer and worked specifically with the citrus and environmental horticulture industries. In January 2009, he began serving as the national affairs coordinator and works with the sugar, peanut

and cotton industries, as well as with federal issues and programs. He also coordinates Farm Bureau's Agricultural Contact Team (FBACT) grassroots program for Florida Farm Bureau and writes a monthly column in the *Florida Agriculture* magazine.

Basford communicates agricultural issues to the congressional delegation and their staff, as well as the members that form the grassroots advocacy group for Florida Farm Bureau.

"As far as Florida Farm Bureau being a grassroots organization, our policy comes from the members. It's important for me to get the right tools in their hands to communicate effectively with their representative," Basford said. "I've learned the importance of the people in agriculture being involved in the political process."

Basford may be a long way from his family's farm in miles, but his agricultural past has strong ties to his future.

"I feel a real commitment to agriculture," Basford said. "I want to make a difference and every day I'm having some sort of meaningful impact on regulation and legislation that comes back and has an impact on farmers."

Basford is a Class VII graduate of the two-year Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources program at the University of Florida. He and his wife, Laura, reside in Gainesville with their two sons, Jackson and Owen.

ACLT Races to Daytona for Fall Industry Tour

By Bridget Hodges

Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow members attended an industry tour around Daytona Beach in October to get a first-

hand look at their future career possibilities.

Ten ACLT members travelled with two advisors to Daytona Beach for an industry tour. The trip brought them from the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA), Hooters, the Daytona International Speedway and the Daytona Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Going to these four different businesses gave the students an idea of how organizations deal with people and try to portray an image to the public, said ACLT member Zachary Putnal.

"The trip gave us an inside look at how to act and react with the public in the communications field," he said.

Industry tours are beneficial for any field because they allow students to see a professional in their environment, said senior and ACLT vice president Cristy Groce.

After meeting a professional golfer at the LPGA, the tour moved to Hooters where they met with Hooters representative Jenelle Freit. Freit graduated from the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, specializing in agricultural communication. She is now the outside sales manager for Hooters for the Jacksonville Coastal and Alabama/Mississippi regions.

"Since I'm graduating, it was interesting to see someone where I will be soon," Groce said.

After the LPGA and Hooters stops, the group moved on to the Daytona International Speedway, where they sat in the press box overlooking the entire speedway.

Visiting organizations outside of the agricultural field gave students some other ideas about future employment, Groce said.

"It made me feel good about my major in the agricultural field because now I see that I can do anything, not just ag," Putnal said. "We left with a stack of press kits, brochures, business cards and hope for the future."



Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow members travelled to Daytona Beach on an industry tour for a behind-the-scenes look at their future job possibilities.

AEC Spotlight: Awards & Accomplishments

College of Agricultural and Life Sciences
CALS Undergraduate Teacher of the Year:
Nicole Stedman

CALS Graduate Advising/Mentor Award:
Glenn Israel

E.T. York Jr. Medal of Excellence (for outstanding CALS junior):
Gavin Rollins

CALS Alumni and Friends Horizon Award (To be presented in September):
Bridget Carlisle

CALS Alumni and Friends Award of Distinction (To be presented in September):
Frankie Hall

Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists, Agricultural Communication Section
Outstanding Graduate Student Research Presentation:
Angie Lindsey

Outstanding Graduate Student Research Poster:
O. T. Thakadu, Tracy Irani & Ricky Telg

American Association of Agricultural Education, Southern Region
Outstanding Graduate Student Poster:
Katie Abrams, Andrew Thoron & Rochelle Strickland

2nd Runner-Up Graduate Student Poster:
Rochelle Strickland, Hannah Carter, Amy Harder, Grady Roberts & Al Wysocki

1st Runner Faculty Poster:
Kirby Barrick

2nd Runner-Up Faculty Poster:
Greg Gifford, Niccole Stedman & Karen Cannon

Outstanding Graduate Student Research Presentation:
Allison Britton, Andrea Andrews & Greg Gifford

1st Runner-Up Graduate Student Research Presentation:
Anna Warner & Brian Myers

2nd Runner-Up Graduate Student Research Presentation:
Robert Strong & Amy Harder

AAAE Southern Region Outstanding Young Member Award:
Brian Myers



Doctoral student Andrew Thoron has been selected to receive the 2010 Jimmy G. Cheek Graduate Student Medal of Excellence Award. This award is made annually to a graduate student who demonstrates high academic potential and achievement, leadership and community involvement, commitment and passion about the student's chosen field of study, personal sacrifice for the student's education, and effort above and beyond the call of duty. He is the second recipient of this new award in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. Another AEC graduate, Sebastian Galindo, received this award in 2009.

Journal of Southern Agricultural Education Research Outstanding Article Award:
Robert Strong & Glenn Israel

National Watermelon Association
Jessica Southard was named 2010 National Watermelon Queen at the NWA Convention in Dallas in February.

Yamaha Motor Corporation
\$2,500 travel scholarship awarded to Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow

Food Systems Institute
Food Systems Institute Fellow:
Brian Myers

North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture
NACTA Fellow:
Jim Dyer

NACTA Graduate Student Teaching Award:
Karen Cannon & Rochelle Strickland



Holly O'Ferrell was selected as one of 23 faculty and staff to receive IFAS-level recognition in the 2010 UF Superior Accomplishment Awards program. She is pictured here receiving her award with College of Agricultural and Life Sciences Dean Kirby Barrick.



Casey Wohl: The Getaway Girl

By Julie Morse

A graduate of the University of Florida's Agricultural Education and Communication Department's master's degree program has created a social networking site that connects female travelers from all around the world to share information regarding experiences and advice relating to travel.

Since graduating in 1998 with her master's degree in agricultural communication, Wohl is now the owner of Gray Dog Communications and the creator of The Getaway Girl networking site.

Wohl has two passions in her life: her friends and traveling the world. With no social networking site for female travelers prior to the creation of Getaway Girl Connect, Wohl created this for women from all around the world to connect, relate and share tips with each other on their different travel experiences.

"I knew that if I could connect women travelers it would be beneficial for everyone," Wohl said.



AEC graduate Casey Wohl coordinates trips for women travelers.

This site is an open area for women all over the world to ask different questions

about traveling. Many women have shared their opinions and experiences in regards to their travel, which has transformed Getaway Girl Connect into a positive network.

Along with women around the world sharing and receiving travel advice and experiences with each other, Wohl also receives travel advice from reading the stories that people post on the site.

"I do not get any direct benefit from this site, but I get a lot of indirect satisfaction in knowing that the women travelers involved appreciate the forum and love to talk about travel with other women from around the world," she said.

The site has received positive feedback regarding the ability for women to network and exchange information about favorite trips and destinations. This ability to network has allowed all associated with the site to access tips on future trips they are planning. Wohl's networking site is www.GetawayGirlConnect.com.

New program, new employee in AEC's e-Learning Institute

By Hope Kelly & Chelci Owen

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication's e-Learning Institute is growing by adding a new employee and a new program.

The e-Learning Institute supports the department by developing creative and innovative educational methods that can be delivered electronically. The institute is best known for the master's degree program delivered via distance education technologies to Extension agents and agriscience teachers.

"This program is delivered completely online, so students never physically enter a classroom," said e-Learning coordinator Hope Kelly. "Their education is supported through a comprehensive curriculum that has been

developed for the Web."

This January, the e-Learning Institute added a new program of study specializing in agricultural leadership.

"Discussions with AEC client groups strongly suggest a need for a leadership degree option," said e-Learning program director and AEC graduate coordinator Brian Myers.

As a result, the department expanded current distance courses and developed a program of instruction to support current employees in a variety of workplaces. Students in the agricultural leadership specialization focus on a core of agricultural education and communication courses, along with an emphasis in designing educational/training programs, professional presentation enhancement, leadership development, teaching/training methods, and interpersonal communication.

This degree option will be of particular interest for those serving in state and national organizations, agencies and departments, as well as commercial agricultural entities, Myers said.

"The addition of the leadership specialization provides leaders in the ag industry the opportunity to advance their leadership knowledge and skill," Myers said. "Adding the leadership specialization allows us to expand our distance offerings to more closely match our

on-campus master's of science degree offering."

In addition to a new program, the e-Learning Institute welcomed a new employee in January, Shay Davis. Davis is working to support a long-term project in developing reusable learning objects (RLOs). Davis is developing innovative learning products for several faculty members.

"It's amazing what we can do to enhance the e-learning experience with RLOs," Davis said. "We can take a basic PowerPoint presentation in any given topic and turn it into a Flash presentation where more viewers have the ability to actually interact with the curriculum through videos, images and other learning tools."



Shay Davis



Hope Kelly

Yeomans Starts Agriculture Promotion Company

By Marcus Summ

Recently starting an agricultural promotion company of her own, Tobitha Yeomans is a seasoned veteran of agricultural marketing.

Following her graduation from the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication in 1996, Yeomans began working for Sparr Building and Farm Supply where she served as a farm consultant. After just a few years, she was promoted to feed division manager and marketing director where she made some big changes.

"I made changes in their product line shortly after I came on board with them, one of which was adding Purina mills," Yeomans said. "I developed strategies and guided the growth of the Purina feed, making Sparr the largest Purina horse feed dealer in the United States for the past eight years."

As the marketing director at Sparr Building and Farm Supply, Yeomans found herself responsible for all print, radio and television advertising. Some of her products included circulars, direct mailers, monthly

advertisements in various publications, sales, special events, customer appreciations, trade shows and employee training. She was also responsible for the grand opening of two new Sparr locations in Williston and Wildwood.

After a 12-year career at Sparr Building and Farm Supply, Yeomans seized the opportunity to start a company of her own.

"I had seen the need for an agency that actually understood what the clients in the agriculture industry were describing and knew the best way to market those products," she said. "I also saw that most feed stores could not justify a full time marketing person."

Yeomans proceeded to start AgriPROMO, which offers feed and farm store advertising plans, inventory evaluations, comparative shopping, mystery shopping in their stores, Web site building and event planning for sales and special events.

AgriPROMO clients and jobs range from feed and farm stores, pet crematories, seed producers, farmers and ranchers, tree farms, horse farms and trainers and rodeos.

Yeomans has always had a passion for agriculture.

"I was raised in the agriculture industry and fully recognize that agriculture is an industry that mankind cannot survive without," Yeomans said. "I love the statement, 'Destroy our cities and we will build again. Destroy our farms and grass will grow in the streets.'"



Tobitha Yeomans, a 1996 AEC graduate, recently began an agricultural promotions company, agriPROMO.

AEC Student Engages in Medieval Armored Combat

By Anthony Esposito

An Agricultural Education and Communication senior participates in a society that re-creates the arts and skills of pre-17th century Europe, which includes engaging in fights with swords and shields.

Holiday Griffin first heard about the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) through her former community college speech professor who recommended that she research the SCA.

"I love medieval history and the whole lore of it, so I decided to check out the Society for Creative Anachronism," Griffin said.

She then went to the Hoggetowne Medieval Fair where the SCA demonstrated their heavy armored combat. She officially joined in June 2006.

Griffin is heavily involved in the armored combat where members of the society re-enact medieval combat through actual fighting. Combatants can face each other in single combat tournaments, or can take part in large melee battles that can have dozens or even hundreds of combatants on each side.

"We try to make it look as period as possible

but with also keeping up with safety standards because we do take full contact hits," Griffin said.

The heavy armored combat consists of SCA members of who suit up in full medieval



Holiday Griffin, AEC senior, looks for her next opponent on the field during Hoggetowne Medieval Faire.

armor and wield solid bamboo swords all resembling those used in the pre-17th century. They engage in the fight as if they were

battling in the medieval period.

The SCA has rules that make the combat realistic but safe. Griffin said that if a person is hit in the arm by the opponent's sword, the person must put that arm behind their back and would no longer be able to use it until the fight is finished.

"The combat is not staged at all. It's skill on skill," Griffin said.

She said her combat skills could be better, and they improve more and more with experience. Currently she ranks as a squire, a ranking within the society that indicates a combatant's skill level. She is on the road to knighthood, the highest skill level.

Griffin said she plans to go to future SCA events and does not foresee herself ever leaving the society.

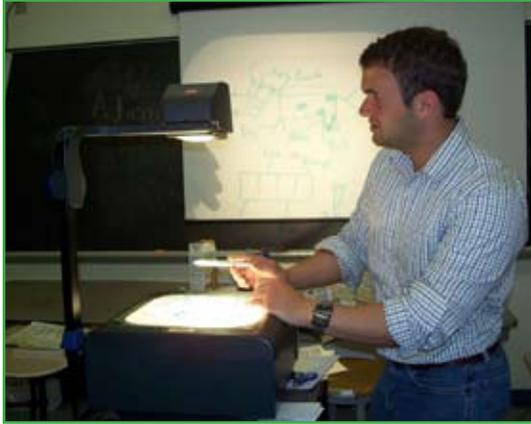
"A lot of the stuff we do is events for ourselves which are held on the weekends where we all dress up in medieval clothing and we do fighting and we do the gentle arts like dancing, calligraphy and basket weaving. Whatever you name it, we do it," Griffin said, "but we also do public demonstrations for schools to teach kids about medieval history."

Agricultural Education Students Teach with 'Training Wheels'

By Sarah DeLoach

Seniors in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication's agricultural education specialization worked in Florida public schools to complete their required 12-week internships before graduating in May.

The student teaching internships are designed to give students the opportunity



Brady Revels, a senior in the agricultural education specialization, uses the overhead as a tool to help teach his students

to gain practical experience by applying concepts and methods they have learned in their agricultural education undergraduate curriculum, said graduate assistant Andrew Thoron.

A year before the students embark on this 12-week journey, they are asked to select three schools throughout the state where they would possibly like to intern.

"Many times we have students who wish to intern at the same school. That's when placement can become an issue," Thoron said.

When choosing a possible school, a student has to consider many factors, such as housing in their current and potential locations.

"After students have made their selections, the agriculture education faculty and I sit down to discuss the best fit for the student," Thoron said.

Once the students are paired with their school, they can then establish a relationship with the primary teacher of their school if a relation does not

already exist, he said.

Seniors then interact with their teacher for the next year, making lesson plans, discussing the culture of the school and region and deciding what the students will learn for the following 12 weeks.

"We like to tell our students these internships are kind of like teaching with training wheels," said Brian Myers, associate professor of agricultural education.

Senior Brady Revels interned at Pine Ridge High School in Volusia County.

"The process of choosing a school, working with the teacher at your school for a year straight and adapting to a different environment can be somewhat overwhelming," Revels said.

The internship gave him the opportunity to have a real-world experience before graduation.

"This has been one of the best experiences of my life," he said. "It has given me a taste of what life could be like for me shortly after graduation."

Lindsey Returns for AEC Doctoral Program

By Chelci Owen

After a 10-year absence from Rolfs Hall, Angie Lindsey is back.

After receiving her master's degree in agricultural communication from the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, Lindsey waited 10 years before returning to the department to work towards her doctoral degree.

Once Lindsey was back in Gainesville, she began working at the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural

Resources, commonly known as the Center PIE. Center PIE enhances the understanding of agriculture, natural resources as well as the environment by providing research-based information and raising awareness concerning important societal issues.

"Center PIE is a great project to further my communication skills and conduct research on the most effective ways to manage issues affecting the agriculture and natural resources industries," Lindsey said.

Lindsey grew up as an only child in Columbia, S.C. While her family didn't live on a farm, her grandparents owned a small farm where she was able to be involved with agriculture from a young age.

"My father was the executive director of the South Carolina Pork Board, so I have always been involved in the agriculture community," she said. "You'll always have a job if you go into agriculture or medicine, and considering I didn't do well in biology, I went with the agriculture industry."

Lindsey completed her bachelor's degree at the College of Charleston, but continued her education at the University of Florida, where she received her master's degree in Agricultural Communication.

After graduation, Lindsey worked as the marketing and communications manager of the Jacksonville Zoo. Lindsey said her training and experience with media relations at the zoo has helped her become a better communicator, and will hopefully help her when she becomes a professor.

"Having some of those real world experiences and being able to say, 'This is what happened to me, don't let it happen to you,' I think it helps students get a picture in their mind to better understand concepts," she said.

Lindsey's job at the Jacksonville Zoo led to her position as the executive director of the North Florida Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, a program dedicated to the education and research to fight breast cancer.

"I will probably always be a volunteer with Komen. I like the nonprofit world and the issues they deal with," Lindsey said. "It's nice to know when you wake up in the morning that you have helped other people."



Angie Lindsey (second from left) stands with Christy Chiarelli (left) and Tracy Irani (right).

Hartmann, UF Professors Tackle Water Issues in the Middle East

By Christina Calderaio

Several University of Florida professors, including the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication's Marta Hartmann, recently collaborated with other experts from around the world to design a project to address the Middle East's water crisis.

The team is now waiting for funding after proposing the Water and Livelihoods Initiative (WLI) in the Middle East to the U.S. Agency for International Development in August 2009.

The proposed five-year project would improve water and land issues of Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine.

Several professors from UF and five other U.S. universities were selected to be members of WLI in the Middle East. Other members include environmental experts

from the European Union, worldwide agricultural research institutes, and scholars, local farmers and ministers of agriculture from each of the seven Middle Eastern countries.

"Water issues are highly technical," said Hartmann, a lecturer in UF's Department of



Marta Hartmann traveled to Syria and Jordan in May 2009 as part of the University of Florida's efforts in the Water and Livelihoods Initiative in the Middle East. Hartmann is pictured here with a Jordanian farmer.

Agricultural Education and Communication. "It calls for agricultural engineers and soil and water scientists, but also social scientists that deal with livelihood and diffusion of information."

Through UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, Hartmann was invited by the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) to attend two of the three workshops necessary to develop the project proposals.

With a doctorate in international and development education, Hartmann's role was to ensure that social issues such as gender, capacity building, communication systems, and rural livelihoods were included in the proposals.

ICARDA took Hartmann and other WLI members to local villages and farms to better understand the region's environment and people. Members found that the most pressing issues in the Middle East's environmental crisis are the declining water resources and the overuse of chemicals in agriculture production.

Aquifers are severely depleted so farmers do not have enough water to irrigate their crops. Additionally, the harsh use of fertilizers and pesticides has stripped the soil of nutrients and, in some cases, ruined harvests.

If this project is funded, it is possible that these problems can be overcome with help from WLI members to educate locals on the proper and most efficient ways to produce agriculture, Hartmann said.

"I am optimistic that if these nations, at all levels, effectively implement sustainable practices, then there is a great possibility that many of the Middle East's water issues will be addressed," Hartmann said.

AEC Grad Coordinates County Communications

By Coco Altman

Whether she is planning an event, branding or rushing to a scene for immediate media coverage, Kristin Guira is eager to take responsibility and initiative.

Guira graduated from the University of Florida with a master's degree in Agricultural Education and Communication in 2002. Soon after, she began applying her communications and creative knowledge for the Florida 4-H program.

As the public relations and communications coordinator, Guira was always kept busy. The state 4-H program supervises all of the county 4-H programs across Florida.

"I had an interesting role. There were a lot of responsibilities. It was a challenge that I enjoyed," Guira said.

Her job included both journalistic and creative tasks. Guira reviewed and approved every press release, newsletter, public service announcement and message being sent from each county division before it was released to the public.

Guira also worked with people from the community to make the Florida 4-H Web site more user-friendly and produced posters for the state art program. Occasionally Guira also



Kristin Guira

dealt with crisis communications.

In 2006 Guira moved back to Polk County and was hired as the communications specialist for the Polk County Board of County Commissioners. Guira is kept busy working many functions including media relations, event planning, Web site design, occasional script writing and being a public information officer. As a PIO, she informs the general public and stakeholders of PCBCC's program activities.

To add to her wide array of jobs Guira is regularly on call for emergency medical services.

"EMS is really the most exciting part of my job. I never know what I am going to find when I arrive at a scene," Guira said.

It is her duty to advise the public of an emergency situation before anything gets out of hand. The interaction and urgency of this task makes this Guira's favorite part of her job.

AEC Photos



Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow traveled to Ft. Worth, Texas, in July 2009 for the 10th Annual Agricultural Media Summit. The event included a dinner and social event in Ft. Worth's famous Stockyards Station. ACLT member Barbie Garcia brands a mark on a board. She later adds more brand marks to it to form a "UF."



AEC's Graduate Student Association collected more than 2,000 pounds of nonperishable food items for Gainesville Community Ministries before the winter break. AECGSA members are shown here sorting the food and in front of the large collection of food items.



The department held an "open house" for new Communication and Leadership Development students in September. The incoming junior CLD class was the largest ever. Organizers of the event wanted all new students to learn about courses, curriculum and opportunities to get involved in the department and at UF, in general.

Irani digs into flower marketing research

By Julie Morse

University of Florida associate professor Tracy Irani is conducting research in collaboration with the university's Horticultural Sciences Department to develop new ways to market flowers and research different ways to reach the consumer interest of Generation Y.

Irani teamed up with Dave Clark in Food and Resource Economics to conduct research in order to understand the way Gen Yers feel on buying flowers in today's flower market. Irani and Clark received a grant from the American Floral Endowment to conduct the research.

Irani got involved in this study due to her interest in consumer marketing and how the millennial generation can make a big impact on the floral industry. With this specific generation of people, ranging from the ages of 18 to 27, the market for flowers is not in demand due to a lack of interest.

The research team decided on using a new methodology to conduct their research which has never been used in the floral market. Instead of using self reports to conduct the research, the team will video record students to later observe their behavioral tendencies in order to gain a better

understanding of Generation Y. Research has shown that watching their facial expressions and nonverbal communication provides researchers with more accurate feedback.

"There is research that has been done that psychologically people respond to flowers in a positive way. Flowers make you happy," Irani said. "What kinds of flowers make you the happiest? Are you happy enough to buy flowers? If we figure that out, I think that can be very useful."

An experimental trial was held in December at a poinsettia floral show. Irani and her research team are currently analyzing

Skills Learned in AEC Help Nedley Succeed

By Tiffany Dale

During her youth, Heather Nedley could be found helping her father in the groves of her family's citrus operation in Desoto County. Today, Nedley has expanded beyond that small operation in Arcadia to represent thousands of farmers and ranchers in Polk County.

"My roots are in the agriculture industry," Nedley said. "I want to always be involved with the industry."

Polk County Farm Bureau (PCFB) is one of the largest county federations in the state, representing more than 4,600 member families. In her sixth year at PCFB, Nedley is working as the executive director, reporting directly to a 27-member board of directors.

Skills she obtained during her tenure at UF as an Agriculture Education and Communication student, and the value of real-life job experiences have helped her adapt to the constant changes in the industry and in her current job, Nedley said.

"My job changes day to day, so it is necessary to have a variety of skills to successfully complete the various initiatives we are working on," she said.

From spearheading a grassroots effort on a local issue to speaking to local schools about the industry, she has to wear many hats for the industry and for Polk County Farm Bureau.

Prior to working for PCFB, Nedley worked for the Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association in Orlando. At FNGLA Nedley worked on a statewide

level with a full staff of professionals. At PCFB she works on a county level with a part time staff.

In addition to her duties with PCFB, she is involved with the community and industry groups. Nedley currently serves on the Polk

County 4-H Foundation Board of Directors, Junior League of Greater Lakeland Board of Directors and also the treasurer of the Ag Institute of Florida.

Although state and nationwide issues seem to have serious effects on farmers, local level policy changes can be just as detrimental to farmers on a daily basis, Nedley said.

"A lack of understanding exists of agriculture. It is important to have good communication skills, such as those learned in the AEC department, when working on local issues with elected officials and decision makers," Nedley said.

As decisions are made on local agricultural issues, which affect farmers, PCFB works to be the "voice of agriculture" to make sure the best interests of the farmer are kept in the forefront, she said.

As Nedley works to insure the success and viability of agriculture in Polk County, the success of the organization stems from the extensive network of enthusiastic and dedicated industry and board members in Polk County, she said.

"I truly enjoy working for the agriculture industry in Polk County. I work with honest, hard-working, all-around good people," Nedley said.

Engaged industry members and good agricultural communicators is a great combination to ensure the vibrant success of agriculture in the future, she said.



Heather Nedley, shown here with the "Got Milk?" cow, supports local farmers at Polk County's "Taste of Agriculture Event."

Successful Switch to an Online Setting

By Chelsea Kauss

The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication is offering its first online undergraduate course, taught by extension education assistant professor Amy Harder.

AEE 3313 is an introductory course offered to anyone with an interest in non-formal learning and extension, Harder said. It deals with the development and role of extension education.

"It's a survey of a little bit of everything in extension," she said.

While Harder taught the class previously in the classroom two years ago, the course has now been switched to a completely online setting. The material was suited better to teaching online, Harder said.

"We can do things differently online with this class," she said. "We can take advantage of interactive media from other universities as well."

Enrollment was low for the course when

it was taught in the classroom. Making the course online was a mechanism to boost enrollment, Harder said.

"When the course switched to an online atmosphere, enrollment more than doubled from eight to 20 students," Harder said.

Students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences were the only ones to take the course in its previous face to face format, Harder said. Now, students in different colleges who have an interest in the subject are in the online section because it is more convenient, she said.

"I get to tell more people about extension," she said.

Although this course is suited well for an online setting, not all courses can be delivered through this medium, Harder said.

"I think teaching a course online depends on what the course is versus how it's

delivered," she said.

Kevin Kersey, an agricultural education and communication student enrolled in AEE 3313, praises online classes.

"I love online courses because they allow me to work at my own pace on the assignments and complete them when I want to or have time throughout the week," Kersey said.

The departmental faculty viewed AEE 3313 switching to an online setting as something of a pilot experience for undergraduate courses, Harder said.

"Enrollment went up, there were no complaints, and generally everyone approves," Harder said.

Best Supports Agriculture with Communications Company

By Marcus Summ

Graduating from the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication in 1996, Erin Best immediately threw herself into the career world of agriculture.

"I graduated on a Saturday, and on Monday morning, thanks again to some help by Dr. Ricky Telg, I started as the director of marketing for the Florida Strawberry Growers Association," she said.

Best said she felt a bit overwhelmed at first as a new college graduate with such a big responsibility, but she soon found her new job to be fun and quite rewarding. Best found herself in charge of everything from public relations to newsletters and creating the association's first Web site.

Best continued to serve in that capacity until June 2000, when she decided she was ready to start a company of her own.

"From a very young age I wanted to start my own business, but I knew that I needed some experience first," Best said.

After gaining that experience at FSGA, she began to fulfill that dream and FSGA became her first client at her new company, The Market Place.

The Market Place's two primary project areas are Web design and video production.

"We have over 70 Web site clients, and we offer services in the area of design, development and hosting," Best said. "In the area of video production we create

promotional, education and historical pieces."

Recently, the company has created a Web site for Purina and a new logo for the American Farm Bureau Foundation.

The Market Place has had some great fans and supporters along the way, Best said.



Erin Best, owner of The Market Place and a Department of Agricultural Education and Communication graduate, supports agriculture throughout the state of Florida.

"Clients like the Florida FFA Association, Marshall Tree Farm, Florida Farm Bureau and Pioneer Growers have been with us since the beginning," she said.

Best has also been fortunate to work with

her employee Joel Bockoras. Bockoras has been the Web designer and "everything else technical" guru at The Market Place for the past five years, Best said.

"He's more than just a good employee, he's a strategic part of our business model success," she said.

On top of all her other projects at The Market Place, Best has also been hired by Superior Productions to conduct interviews and shoot video footage around the Southeast for RFD-TV. The footage is sent to Fort Worth where it is edited for 30-minute episodes of the television show "The American Rancher."

"It is very rewarding to be able to sit down in front of the television and watch something you were involved with," she said.

Best was also a part of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute's – Class V and was chosen as a McCloy Fellow last year by American Farm Bureau. In September 2008, the fellowship sent Best and three other American agriculturalists to Germany for a three-week travel study, where she learned about the German cattle, dairy and sugar beet industries.

Growing up on a farm, Best said she has always been passionate about agriculture.

"If I couldn't farm myself, then promoting and marketing their products was the next best thing," Best said.

AEC Photos



Agricultural Communicators and Leaders of Tomorrow hosted a “ropes course” day for faculty, staff, and students in the department in January. Everyone participated in team-building activities including having the entire team balance on a small wooden box and getting across an obstacle course.



Alpha Tau Alpha, the honor society for agricultural education, communication, and leadership, held its induction ceremony in early April. More than 30 undergraduate and graduate students were inducted. It was the largest group of inductees ever at the University of Florida.



The Department of Agricultural Education and Communication was well-represented at the Southern Association of Agricultural Scientists Convention in Orlando in February. Faculty and graduate students presented several academic papers and posters during the conference. Here, graduate students Tre Easterly and Sallie Ann Sims pose in front of one of the posters.