

# AEC REVIEW

FALL 2011

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE



An Agricultural Education and Communication professor is using his global upbringing as the basis for a program to change the way that college students learn. Grady Roberts draws from his childhood experiences on his philosophy of globalizing the way agricultural issues are taught.



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The Agricultural Education and Communication department did not have to look far outside of its alumni pool for a new assistant professor.

## Big move for AEC

Many members of the Agricultural Education and Communication Department moved to the Bryant Space Science Center between the months of July and September.

Those involved in the move include faculty and staff with the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources, the eLearning Institute, the Program Development and Evaluation Center (PDEC) and the Wedgworth Leadership Institute.

Additionally, the AEC department acquired space for a larger Macintosh lab, a research computer lab and conference room.

Bryant Hall is located on the corner of Fletcher Drive and Stadium Road, across from the Hub.

Jodi Modica (right) organizes her new office in Bryant Hall. Modica is the Academic Support Services Coordinator for the AEC department.



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# Invasive plants pose danger to Florida ecosystem

by: Kelcee Griffis

An Agricultural Education and Communication graduate student is directing a statewide survey to help curb the spread of invasive plants.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is launching a survey to assess boaters' awareness of the danger aquatic invasive plants pose to Florida's ecosystem and of how boaters may be spreading these plants. AEC graduate student Kate Wilson is in charge of the study.

Wilson said Florida is one of the top exporters of invasive plants such as hydrilla, water lettuce and floating water hyacinth. These aquatic plants spread rapidly and threaten native animals, environments and even recreational areas used for fishing or swimming.

"Initially boaters say hydrilla is good because they get a lot of fish around it. But it's like cancer," said Don Schmitz with the FWC Invasive Plant Management Section. "It becomes so prolific it creates a canopy on top of the water. If you don't manage it, you have a complete reign of organic material that depletes oxygen from the water."

Wilson said boaters are the primary factor in the spread of aquatic invasive plants, especially bass fishers who are known to travel throughout the state for tournaments.

Schmitz said Florida spends roughly \$30 million annually in controlling, maintaining and preventing the spread of aquatic invasive



Boaters often spread invasive species such as hydrilla by not cleaning boat propellers and other equipment between uses. Kate Wilson hopes the survey will gather information to guide a new communication campaign.

species.

Currently, the state funds an educational outreach program that provides curriculum about aquatic invasive species for students from kindergarten to high school.

"[The state] also has an informational website and brochures for parks, but not much in the way of targeting boaters specifically," Wilson said. "As good as that is, we're missing this whole population who is actually actively transporting species."

Wilson said placing signs at boat launches in the '80s was the last major campaign targeted at informing boaters about aquatic invasive species.

"It hasn't been an active program for a while," Wilson said.

Wilson secured a \$30,000 grant to survey registered Florida boaters and non-resident freshwater anglers who apply for in-state fishing permits.

The survey, which arrived in over 4,000 boaters' mailboxes in October, is aimed at gathering information to guide a new communication campaign that could include workshops, billboards and TV and radio spots.

"The survey questions are designed to test attitudes and habits of boaters," Wilson said.

The survey asks boaters questions such as how often they travel with their boats, and how often they drain standing water out of their boats.



Without monitoring and awareness, invasive species such as water lettuce can take over a lake's ecosystem.



# AEC faculty help communities affected by BP oil spill

by: Justin Wilson

Faculty members in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication are helping needy communities affected by the BP oil spill.

AEC professor Tracy Irani is the lead collaborator on a five-year multimillion-dollar grant from the National Institutes of Health. The grant's funding is being used to study the effects of the oil spill on residents in the Panhandle region of Florida.

Irani said that the grant consists of four projects. Three of them are solely based on researching different communities, while the fourth, which she coordinates, collects all the data from the research and compiles it. This fourth project is called the Communication Outreach and Dissemination Program.

"The point of our program is to reach out and help the communities by

using a concept called resiliency," Irani said. "The idea is to develop strategies to help communities sustain themselves. One way is to help train residents to be prepared for future disasters, while the other is how to bounce back after a disaster."



Tracy Irani

AEC research assistant professor Sebastian Galindo is also one of the collaborators of the Community Outreach and Dissemination Program.



Sebastian Galindo

Galindo said that the idea behind the program isn't only to help prepare residents for future disasters, but also to train local extension agents who will be the first ones on the scene when disaster strikes.

"We need to prepare extension agents to be at their best to deal with

these things," Galindo said. "It is difficult because they are affected by the disaster like anyone else. We're working on strategies with them to help cope with the disaster, but at the same time perform effectively."

Galindo said that the program is still in its early stages and that the project team does not expect to get information from the other research programs until April 2012, in order to get started on the outreach and dissemination program.

"Overall, we need to get people to have stronger communities because the best way to deal with a disaster is to be prepared for it," Galindo said. "It's not if disasters will happen, but when they will happen."

## Experiencing Chinese agriculture through Western eyes

by: Tiffani Luckey

To gain knowledge of leadership in different multicultural forms while getting a chance to travel outside of the classroom, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) Ambassadors took a 10-day trip to China in May to study its agricultural practices and to learn about community leadership.

The CALS Ambassadors are a select group of students who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in academics as well as student leadership. Their objective is to create awareness of the academic programs and career opportunities in food, agriculture and natural resources among students, teachers, advisers and

the general public in Florida.

"The main objective of the trip was to expose students to a different culture, agriculture, natural resources and the life sciences," said CALS Leadership Institute Director Charlotte Emerson. The agricultural tour offered the opportunity for students interested in agribusiness to combine business with pleasure through sightseeing and intercultural communication. "The visit was of great value in that students were able to experience various aspects of Chinese agriculture and visit many of the historical sites," said Emerson.

"China was a great experience for me because not only did I learn how

other countries produced agricultural products, but I also learned firsthand the differences in our cultures," said CALS Ambassador Carissa Driggers. "This made me very grateful for benefits I have in America and also gave me a great respect for Chinese culture."

The Ambassadors got the chance to experience culture, history, cuisine and language of different regions of China while developing an appreciation and understanding of various horticulture development and agricultural production in China. The students took part in activities

**Continued on page 7**

# The amazing race for leadership

by: Lauren Bates



Leadership isn't just found in a classroom, but all over the country. For the members of Class VIII of the Wedgworth Leadership Institute for Agriculture and Natural Resources, the classroom was just a plane flight away.

WLI Class VIII visited Washington, D.C., New Mexico and Arizona from Sept. 19-29 for its national seminar.

The WLI is a leadership development program for individuals who are involved in private sector Florida agriculture and are influential leaders in their communities. Each class is comprised of 30 individuals who must be nominated within Florida agriculture and pass the selection process.

"The program is over 22 months, 55 days traveling across Florida, nationally and internationally," said WLI director Hannah Carter.

Around 380 unique nominations are received. From those nominations, 60 applications are typically received for each class.

"This national seminar is the amazing race for leadership," Carter

said. "It's 30 people, on the road for 10 days, in three states."

The September seminar focused on agricultural issues at a national level. The class met with lobbyists and congressional representatives for agriculture, seeing how recent developments at a national level could impact Florida.

While in Washington, D.C., WLI participants visited the French and Dutch embassies to prepare them for their international trip to France, Belgium and the Netherlands next June. WLI members also toured Washington, D.C., participated in panel discussions, covering issues relevant to Florida, such as water policy, agricultural trade, world hunger and poverty and the BP oil spill, and attended a show at the Kennedy Center.

The class met with an agricultural leadership program from Hawaii and participated in joint sessions to interact and network with its members. WLI also visited Arizona and New Mexico during the 10-day trip.

**Continued on Page 7**

## Agricultural education professor helps to "Feed the Future"

by: Kacie Pounds

The University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication has joined similar departments from several universities and organizations to develop a project that will help secure food supplies in developing countries.

AEC professor Kirby Barrick is part of an initiative to provide food security for developing countries. The program is Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services, a program designed to improve and create extension programs in the poorest developing countries.

Many farmers in developing countries struggle to produce enough food for their own families and have little to spare for local markets, Barrick said. Therefore, the United States started a global hunger and food security initiative. MEAS is one of several projects that will help developing countries feed their growing populations, he said.

"We want the local people to decide that they want to build or enhance an extension system," he said. "If the locals do not want an extension service, it will not be successful."

MEAS is a consortium of many agricultural institutions, including the University of Illinois, UF and Winrock International. The project consists of three components: teach, learn and apply. Barrick is the team leader for the teaching component.

Barrick is responsible for developing modern approaches that extension agents in developing countries can use to teach farmers. This will provide extension agents in developing countries with easy-to-use materials for teaching farmers about better land management and farming practices.

AEC associate professor Brian Myers assisted Barrick with writing instructional materials.

"I wrote a technical paper to be used by extension agents to improve their educational programming," Myers said. "You have to help the people know how to teach."

The University of Illinois, where Barrick previously taught, is the lead institution for the MEAS project. MEAS is a five-year, \$9 million project funded by the United States Agency for International Development.

The project has begun its second year of development and will start implementing the learning component through the fourth year. The programs Barrick and others develop will be used to teach extension agents in developing countries and provide them with the tools necessary for educating farmers.

"I believe that we will develop extension systems in countries of need that will help the male and female farmers feed the future," Barrick said. "This project will make an impact that will last long after my role is over."

**This national seminar  
is the amazing race for  
leadership**



# AEC student, nationally-ranked triathlete

by: Kelcee Griffis



As a nationally ranked triathlete and cross-country runner who completed 5-kilometer races in under 19 minutes, running has become a lifestyle for Agricultural Education and Communication student Connor Seth.

Seth's interest in running was sparked by trying out for the soccer team at Episcopal High School in Jacksonville, Fla., in the fall of his eighth grade year. When he didn't make the team, he joined cross-country, and continued the sport after transferring to Bishop Kenny High School.

Seth completed his first triathlon, a three-part race that consists of swimming a half-mile, biking 13 miles and running 3.1 miles, the summer before his ninth-grade year.

"The first race was by far the hardest, but it was definitely my favorite," Seth said.

It was hardest because it was an off-road race, and the 13-mile biking segment demanded biking on a rough dirt trail.

As Seth improved as a triathlete, he applied for and was granted a sponsorship from TriSports.com, which awarded him free gear to wear during races.

At the age of 15, Seth ranked 47 nationally in his age category for his overall triathlon scores.

Seth completed his first high school cross-country race in 31 minutes, at an approximate pace of 10 minutes per mile.

To be competitive in most male cross-country races, a runner must log at least seven-minute miles.

"I kept progressing through the year. By the end of the year I was running a personal record of 22 minutes, 34 seconds," Seth said. "I dropped nine minutes. Then it clicked for me and I started running faster."

Belonging to one of the largest cross-country teams in North Central Florida, Seth competed against about 60 other Bishop Kenny teammates for the top seven slots on the team.

"We had a new coach every year," Seth said. "The first coach was the best. He had been there a long time and had a strong bond with us, not only as runners but just as guys."

Each summer, the entire cross-country team traveled to North Carolina for endurance training on the steep mountain slopes.

"It was definitely a bonding experience for us as a team," Seth said.

Seth reached the pinnacle of his high school cross-country career when he logged a 5-kilometer race that was under 19 minutes – an approximate six-minute-per-mile pace.

"I still enjoy doing these things as a hobby," he said. "I've accomplished a lot of things I wanted to do, but it's still a part of me. Now running is a relaxing thing."

# AEC holds Florida agriscience teacher workshop

by: Peter Byatt

Instructors from the University of Florida's Department of Agricultural Education and Communication held a two-day professional workshop to help Florida agriscience teachers create lesson plans for agricultural communication courses.

The curriculum of the June workshop focused on implementing different communication tools for developing lessons such as Web design, video production, communication etiquette and campaign strategies. The workshop was created because high school agricultural communication courses have become much more prevalent in recent years.

"Any Florida middle or high school teacher was eligible to participate in the workshop," said co-organizer Becky Raulerson, research coordinator for the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources. "Some had already taught agricultural communication classes and wanted more information.

Others had never taught agricultural communication but were expected to in future years."

The workshop was held June 22 and 23 in the computer lab and classrooms of Rolfs Hall. This was the first time the workshop had been taught.

University of Florida professors Ricky Telg, Tracy Irani, and media specialist for the department Kevin Kent were the other organizers of the workshop. Formal evaluations were conducted after the workshop to gain an understanding about what areas the teachers found to be the most useful.

"We received positive reviews on every topic we discussed, but the highest rated were the lessons in Photoshop," Telg said. "We will probably do this again next year, maybe do another intro class and then possibly a more advanced workshop for those who participated the year before."

# A new face in Rolfs Hall

by: Caroline Roper

The Agricultural Education and Communication Department did not have to look far outside of its alumni pool for a new assistant professor.

Andrew Thoron started in June as an assistant professor for the AEC department, specializing in agricultural education.

Thoron received his bachelor's degree in agriculture, specializing in agricultural education, at Illinois State University. Thoron taught high school agriscience at Mt. Pulaski High School in Illinois. After three years, Thoron left to work for the Illinois State Board of Education.

One year later, Thoron found himself at the University of Florida.

"I felt like I had a good connection," Thoron said. "Then I visited and I knew that it was a good fit."

Thoron received his master's degree in agricultural education and communication from UF in 2007. After graduation, Thoron moved back to Illinois to work as a faculty member at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Thoron found out about the job

opening at UF and was immediately interested.

"I really like the nature of this department and how everyone works together and our philosophy," Thoron said. "I believe in that."

Thoron's appointment includes both teaching and extension. He hopes to work not only with UF undergraduates, but also with agriscience teachers throughout the state.

"I want my research to have an impact and direct connection to what is going on in the public school system, specifically agricultural programs," Thoron said. "It is very important to me."

Thoron is already making an impression on current students. Kayla Martin, an AEC undergraduate specializing in agricultural education, has class with Thoron.

"He is very helpful," Martin said. "You never know what to expect in class with Dr. Thoron. He keeps us on our toes."

Thoron is teaching AEC4504: Curriculum and Program Planning for



Assistant professor Andrew Thoron works with an agricultural education and communication student.

Agricultural Education this fall. He is also the new advisor for UF Collegiate FFA. He looks forward to working with AEC undergraduates and alumni.

"I'm excited to be a loud and proud Gator," Thoron said.

## AEC grad works with CALS donors

by: Anthony Brinkman



Christy Chiarelli

Of all of the money that comes into the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, a large portion of it is from donors. The person responsible for talking to these donors and accepting these contributions is associate director of development Christy Chiarelli.

Chiarelli earned a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education and Communication with minors in Leadership and Agricultural and Natural Resources law from the University of Florida. She also earned a master's degree in Agricultural Education and Communication from UF.

Chiarelli started her career working for the Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources, also known as the PIE Center.

The PIE Center, part of the AEC Department, connects the public with agriculture. Chiarelli recently took the position of

associate director of development for the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, where her main focus is to raise funds for the College.

The monies Chiarelli raises go to such programs as TailGATOR and scholarships for CALS students.

"I want to create a program to foster annual giving," Chiarelli said. "You need to let the donors know that their donations are going to what they are passionate about."

Chiarelli said she loves the university atmosphere and academia. She wasn't ready to leave the university or its atmosphere after she completed her master's degree.

"I love working with the people here and with the university," she said.

Chiarelli's favorite part of the job is meeting new people.

"I enjoy learning how people are connected to the university," she said.





## Wedgworth, continued from page 4

The class has explored new ways of using social media to keep the university and followers informed. Twitter was used to provide trip updates, and class members wrote blogs and uploaded photos daily to their blogs. A link to the blog is provided on the WLI website <http://wlianr.ifas.ufl.edu>.

"It's the individual's responsibility to be involved," Carter said.

Being involved with local agriculture and politics is an issue that is stressed within the organization, Carter said.

"When they come back from this trip, I want the class to realize it's their responsibility to call up their congressmen and not leave it up to other folks," she said. "They need to use this opportunity for the greater good, and that greater good is going to occur once they are through this program."



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## CALS Ambassadors, continued from page 3

that explored various applications of leadership in the community, from visiting small farms all the way up to commercial farming operations in the three different regions the ambassadors visited.

"I think the best part of the tour was getting to see the differences in the way Chinese people live and carry out their lives. We take things for granted in the States; we are a land of over-indulgence and rarely realize that there are people all around the world that live on next to nothing," said CALS ambassador Rusty Hartline. "When we visited a family farm outside of Shanghai, things were really put into perspective that Chinese people work hard for everything they have and they take pride in everything they do."

Many of the CALS ambassadors were surprised seeing firsthand the massive agricultural output Chinese farms produce daily. "The main difference I see between farming in China versus farming in the United States is the incredibly high efficiency at which Chinese farms operate," said CALS ambassador Alyssa Porter, an entomology and nematology major at the University of Florida. "A greater number of highly specialized employees producing agricultural goods at lower wages has really taken Chinese agriculture to the next level. From extraction of the product to shipping, the farm does it all."

Overall, the CALS ambassadors thought their agricultural tour of China was a great learning experience albeit quite the culture shock.



The CALS Ambassadors are a select group of students who have demonstrated outstanding achievement in academics as well student leadership. Featured in this photo are AEC students serving as CALS Ambassadors: back row (l-r) Rusty Hartline, Aaron Dukes, Zach Sweat, Anthony Cannon; front row (l-r) Carissa Driggers, Arielle Claude, Jessica Southard, Adrienne Boyette. Not pictured Lauren Der.



# AEC alum finds success as a high school agriculture teacher

by: Tyler Brooks

An Agricultural Education and Communication alumnus has found success teaching agricultural education to high school students.

Chris Wilder has been a high school agriculture teacher at Williston High School in Williston, Fla., for 14 years. Wilder graduated from the University of Florida with bachelor's and master's degrees in Agricultural Education and Communication, with a specialization in Agricultural Education.

Wilder said that his graduate experience in AEC helped inspire him in his teaching style, because it used "inquiry-based education." He said that by allowing his students to actually practice their skills and ask questions, they learn more than by just studying a textbook.

"Every student wants to be challenged," Wilder said. "I try my best to reach out to them, because every student is important."

Some of the opportunities Wilder has allowed his students to partake in include growing poinsettias and Easter lilies, landscaping, and growing a garden with the elementary school students at Joyce Bullock Elementary School in Williston.

In 2010, WHS received a School Improvement Grant in the amount of \$375,000. This grant allowed each of the career and technical subject areas at WHS, including agriculture, business and health, to spend about \$125,000 each for necessary improvements. With the money, the school was able to build an agriscience laboratory and allow Wilder to teach agriculture biotechnology. In this class, students will be able to perform extensive research in different aspects of agriculture biotechnology.

Wilder was also excited for the students because the new class will also count as a science credit for high school graduation.

In addition to being a teacher, Wilder is also an adviser for the Williston FFA Chapter. As an adviser, Wilder has been able to coach several state-winning teams in skills-based contests, mainly in the area of nursery and landscaping. In this contest, students are able to test their knowledge and skills of plants, insects and tools.

Wilder said that networking and building relationships with other agriculture teachers can help new agricultural educators early in their career.

"Network and stay involved. If you come from an agriculture program, stay close to your teachers; allow them to become a mentor," Wilder said. "If you don't come from one, find one that you can make a relationship with. Build relationships with teachers; they last forever."

Wilder, his wife Amy, and their two daughters, Kaley, 17, and Lindsey, 11, who are extensively involved in agriculture and FFA, reside in Williston.



Chris Wilder

## AEC senior interns with NAAE

by: Hilary Webb



Cacee Ford

Agricultural Education and Communication senior Cacee Ford brought back to Florida a new outlook on agricultural education from a national perspective during her summer internship with the National Association of Agricultural Educators.

Ford moved to Lexington, Ky., to begin her NAAE internship on the University of Kentucky campus. She was primarily responsible for writing award citations, compiling news releases, updating the NAAE website, and beginning the preparations for the annual NAAE convention to be held in St. Louis, Mo.

"The most exciting part of my internship was discovering how diverse agricultural education programs are throughout the United States," Ford said. "It gave me exposure to how different things are in each state and allowed me to learn new ideas from them."

Ford's AEC specialization is teacher education. She said that the internship opened her eyes to the number of opportunities that she can take part in as a professional colleague and educator.

"This internship has made me think about the bigger picture. It has motivated me to become more creative in what I do," Ford said. "I think, more importantly, it has helped me to see that I desire to be an effective educator, not just in my profession but in my personal life."

Ford said that perhaps the most valuable lesson that she learned while in Kentucky was how to plan. Through the reading of award applications and the organization of events, she learned this first-hand.

"I want to be a better planner in all aspects," she said. "I want to have a planned curriculum for my program, so that my community and administration can effortlessly support my students in their courses and in the FFA chapter."

Upon graduation in May, Ford said she hopes to teach agricultural education for three to five years in a public school, while completing her master's degree online. She then wants to return to the University of Florida as a doctoral student. Her goal is to return to a university and become a professor in agricultural education.

"This summer helped me to understand that I not only want to educate in the classroom, but also to educate others in general about agriculture and the importance of this industry," Ford said.



# Global upbringing influences AEC professor's teaching philosophy

by: Ryan Stanley



Grady Roberts (left) poses with fellow Agricultural Education and Communication faculty member Amy Harder (right) in Ecuador. Roberts and Harder, as well as several other UF faculty members, traveled to Ecuador in the summer of 2010 to gather research for the Teaching Locally, Engaging Globally initiative. Roberts attributes his philosophy of globalizing the way agriculture and environmental issues are taught to his upbringing in a traveling military family.

An Agricultural Education and Communication professor is using his global upbringing as the basis for a program to change the way that college students learn.

AEC associate professor Grady Roberts is a self-proclaimed “military brat.” His father was in the military, which has allowed him to call places such as Spain, England and Germany a home during his childhood.

Roberts draws from his childhood experiences on his philosophy of globalizing the way agricultural and environmental issues are taught.

“Environmental issues don’t stop at borders,” he said. He wants students to understand that no matter where they work, cultures from all over the world will play a factor in their career.

“Many students need to understand that even if they go back to their hometowns, they will encounter people from other cultures in their jobs,” Roberts said. He said his wishes for every student to have the opportunity to experience different cultures as he did.

“I wish I could take all the 50,000 students on this campus and have them study abroad,” he said. Knowing that

this is economically infeasible led him to get involved in the Teaching Locally, Engaging Globally initiative.

The grant, funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, allowed faculty members from the University of Florida, University of Georgia and Texas A&M University to travel to Latin America. Using the experiences learned in these trips, the participants can inform their students of issues facing different countries.

Participants from the three universities went to different countries in Latin America. In the summer of 2010, Roberts led UF faculty went to Ecuador to understand how agriculture is perceived and communicated in the country.

Some of the agricultural issues that Roberts and his colleagues witnessed in Ecuador have already been created into reusable learning objects (RLO). Professors can then use these RLOs to show how agricultural issues facing the country of Ecuador relate to American students and their future careers.

Roberts has said that he hopes that this small amount of exposure from other cultures can benefit the students in the increasingly globalized world.



# Century Farmers remembered across the country in video biographies

by: Corinne Fredrick

An Agricultural Communication and Education graduate is producing videos to help tell the story of agriculture across America.

The American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture approached AEC alumna Erin Freel, owner of The Market Place, an agricultural communication firm specializing in Web and video design, to travel across the country to record video interviews of Century Farmers for a project called Agriculture's Lasting Heritage. The goal of the project is to help re-establish the connection between the farm and the dinner table.

The Century Farmer biographies focus on family values and being good stewards of the land.

While visiting farms and ranches from New York to Nebraska, Freel encountered different types of agriculture. Freel had one of her most memorable experiences at the Kiburg Family Century Ranch located in Iowa this past summer.

"They made me feel so welcome, like part of the family," Freel said.

Not only did they give her a tour of the farm, they also paraded her throughout the entire town, introducing her to everyone.

Some of the agribusiness operations she visited included dairy cattle, corn, soybeans and sugar beets.

"The sugar beets were surprising to me because being from Florida I don't usually think about other ways to process sugar besides sugar cane," Freel said.

Freel is a fifth-generation rancher herself. Her family originally owned a dairy farm in Iowa but relocated to Weirsdale, Fla., where they now run a ranch called the Country Oaks Angus Ranch.

Freel learned how to design Web pages and shoot professional videos while she

**Continued on page 14**

# Graduate Spotlight: Keri Milligan

by: Caroline Roper

When it comes to building a high school agriscience program from scratch, most teachers would jump at the opportunity.

Recent agricultural education and communication graduate Keri Milligan got to do just that at Oakleaf High School in Oakleaf, Fla.

"I got to start this program and make it the way I want it," Milligan said.

Milligan has built the program on biotechnology, with an emphasis on horticulture and vegetable production.

"We are a nontraditional program with nontraditional students in a nontraditional community," Milligan said. "Most of my students won't go into production agriculture, so focusing on livestock wouldn't apply to their post-high school lives."



Lettuce is one of the vegetables grown and sold to teachers by agriscience students.

Milligan's program has a greenhouse, outdoor vegetable gardens and a biotechnology

culture laboratory.

The greenhouse is full of poinsettias, ferns, bromeliads and other plants that students sell as a fundraiser. Outside, students grow vegetables such as carrots, turnips, tomatoes, lettuce and collard greens, which are sold to other teachers.

Additionally, the students grow landscape plants and trees, including dogwoods and red maples.

Milligan said most of her seeds and garden beds have come from Master

Gardeners. The Master Gardener program is coordinated through the Clay County Extension Service.

"I really depend on my resources in the community," Milligan said. "My Master Gardeners help me a lot."

Using their biotechnology culture lab, students extract plant

DNA. Milligan said students do lots of genetics activities, including an activity where students get to pick genes from a variety of plants and create their own "creature."

But homemade creatures and tomato vines aren't the only things that are growing in Oakleaf's program.

**Continued on  
page 13**



# Turning education in application

by: Joshua Jordan

A Department of Agricultural Education and Communication senior used her communication skills as a social media manager for a local political campaign.

As a social media manager for Ted Yoho, Republican candidate for Florida's Sixth Congressional district, AEC student Karen Onsager was in charge of implementing a social media strategy, monitoring day-to-day activities, managing the campaign's presence online and regularly checking feedback and responding to online inquiries.

"Karen was instrumental in setting up my blog, newsletter and Twitter and Facebook pages," Yoho said. "She basically brought me into the 21st Century."

Onsager said that with the knowledge gained from the digital media production courses she took in the AEC Department, she was able to shoot videos for Yoho's campaign and upload them to his website. The agricultural communication-related courses she took also gave her the agricultural background necessary to know what priority issues to address in the campaign, she said.

"Taking the Advanced Agricultural Communication Writing class was vital," Onsager said. "Writing to an audience was crucial to this campaign, and as a social media manager my goal was to get our audience to know Ted."

Onsager said that she is naturally an independent worker at heart but that she recognizes the necessity of being able to work with a group of people in a campaign. The leadership classes taught her team-building skills and how to work in groups.

"Understanding how people work together and how to

delegate are skills you need in the work force," Onsager said. "I also took into account different personalities and what might cause someone to act a certain way, which I learned in my leadership courses."

Onsager said that when working on a campaign time matters, and it is vital to be on top of the issues and ready for a response.

"I really could not have done that internship at all and been proficient at it without what I have learned at the University of Florida," Onsager said.



## AEC grad rejoins department as eLearning specialist

by: Chelsea Watkins



Shay Potts

same department.

Shay Potts, who specialized in Communication and Leadership Development in the AEC department, comes from a long line of Gators; her mother is an AEC alumna, who now teaches science in Williston. Potts' focus was toward the communication aspect of the undergraduate curriculum, specifically

graphic design.

One of the most influential people to Potts while she was at UF was a close friend in the College of Journalism and Communications.

"We had similar coursework," she said. "Many a night went by with us fact checking and reading each other's papers backwards for spelling errors."

Her attention to detail and facts paid off when graduation came in 2009 and it was time to find a job. Upon graduation, Potts learned about a job in LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' marketing department. She interviewed with the non-profit company and began working on graphic design and public relations materials, and stayed there for about six months.

Potts then received an email from a professor she had at UF about a job opportunity within the AEC department.

After applying and interviewing, she was hired and began working for the department in January 2010.

She now develops reusable learning objects for AEC's eLearning Institute. RLOs are single-learning concepts that she designs so people can search for certain subjects and find more information about it. She also works with the professors in developing the eLearning sites for students so all of their content is created in an organized manner.

With opportunities to grow in the university and in Gainesville, Potts is happy where she is.

"I love what I do," she said. "I really enjoy being a part of the AEC department. I get to work with a great set of people and utilize technology and software that I might not have the opportunity to work with in other positions."

# Internship with Lake County 4-H prepares AEC student for career in education

by: Kelcee Griffis

For Agricultural Education and Communication student Chelsea Anderson, a typical week during the summer of 2011 involved teaching children how to cook with herbs, sew clothes and raise poultry.

Anderson accepted an internship with the Lake County Extension Office, where she worked with the 4-H agent to plan, lead and assist with summer programs geared for children ages 6 to 12. Her programs encompassed weekly classes on livestock, a horticulture class and two 4-H summer camps.

Anderson's marquee program of the summer partnered with a local church to host classes teaching children about horticulture.

"We had a one-hour class once a week doing basic plant science: anatomy, vegetable identification and herbs," Anderson said. "I did all of the lesson planning and taught it."

Anderson said transplanting fully-grown herbs into different soils was the centerpiece project for the class. She

directed participants in experimenting with fertilizer usage and observing the effects.

"The last day, the kids got to actually cook," Anderson said.

She led the children through the process of harvesting their herbs, and taught them how to wash and chop herbs to season pasta sauce for a spaghetti meal they shared together.

"It was something different for them," Anderson said of the horticulture class. "A lot of them didn't have a background in plants or vegetables."

At a 4-H summer camp in Ocala, Fla., Anderson was a cabin mom.

"It was my first time ever at summer camp," Anderson said. "I mostly supervised."

Anderson's supervising duties extended out of the cabin to outdoor activities including swimming in the springs, a dance, a flag-retiring ceremony and a marshmallow-gun war.

Anderson also assisted with Fashion Camp, a week-long 4-H camp that taught



AEC student Chelsea Anderson spent Summer 2011 teaching 4-H programs in Lake County, such as demonstrating how to make bleach tie dye at Fashion Camp.

children basic sewing skills.

Participants learned about different fabrics, stitches and patterns, made bleach tie dye and kept a record book of the projects they completed. They also took a trip to local stores to analyze detergent varieties, brands and prices.

For a program focused on teaching youth about livestock, Anderson planned lessons, taught workshops and led hands-on activities.

Anderson said this program ran four days a week for about a month. Each day of the week was dedicated to a different subject: poultry, goats, craft projects and equine sciences.

Anderson said she plans to spend the spring 2012 semester teaching agriculture in the Lake County Public School system.

"Although I am an education major, this was my first experience actually teaching," Anderson said. "Now I have a better understanding of the area and expectations."



Children plant herbs as part of a summer class taught by Chelsea Anderson. One of Anderson's 4-H programs partnered with a local church to teach basic herb growing and cooking techniques to middle-school children.



# Milligan, continued from page 10



Oakleaf High School's greenhouse is full of tomato plants, ferns, poinsettias, cactus plants and bromeliads.

Oakleaf's agriscience program has grown from 24 to over 100 students. Oakleaf FFA has 100 percent membership, helping award the program as a Premier Chapter and a Three-Star National Chapter.

Milligan also won the 2011 Florida Agriscience Teacher of the Year. This award is presented by the Florida FFA Foundation, and recognizes teachers who have inspired and enlightened their students through engaging and interactive lessons in the science of agriculture.

The cornerstone activity Oakleaf FFA is hosting this year is an Agricultural College and Career Fair. Over 20 institutions are attending, ranging from the University

of Florida's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences to John Deere, Syngenta, the Jacksonville Zoo and even the Jacksonville Jaguar's Turf Management Division.

"Kelly Mosley and I came up with it and she ran with it," Milligan said. "We are inviting everyone.

Mosley is also an agricultural education and communication graduate who specialized in agricultural education. After teaching agriscience for a few years, she is now the Career and Technical Education Specialist for Clay County School District.

Milligan said their goals are to recruit students, provide career exploration options and increase agriculture awareness.

With a rapidly growing program, valuable resources and support from her local community, Milligan is excited about the endless possibilities for her students.

"I would really like to be a student in my own program," Milligan said.



## AEC alumna puts skills to the test in UF's College of Fine Arts

by: Tyler Brooks

An Agricultural Education and Communication graduate has taken what she learned in the department and from her internship and is putting her skills to the test in her new job at the University of Florida.

Rachel Berry is a program development assistant with UF's College of Fine Arts. In her new position, Berry works with the UF



Friends of Theater and Dance, solicits mailing, writes news releases and plans events.

"I'm lucky to be surrounded by so much creativity," Berry said. "It makes marketing much easier."

Berry graduated from UF with a bachelor's degree in Agricultural Education and Communication in 2009. In 2010, Berry attended graduate school at Florida State University, graduating with a master's degree in integrated marketing and management communication.

After obtaining her master's degree, Berry completed a public relations internship with Fleishman-Hillard International Communications in Dallas. Berry worked on several business accounts, including the Boy Scouts of America, Texas Tech University and Chevrolet.

Berry worked with social media managers,

digital media managers and content managers. She saw that Fleishman-Hillard hired people who were experienced in the digital area of public relations.

"It taught me the important lesson of how being innovative and creative as a professional makes you valuable," she said.

Berry realized that when applying for careers or internships, work experience with different organizations is just as important as grades.

"Having a perfect 4.0 means nothing if you're up for a job and your competition has experience with different organizations in different roles," Berry said. "Don't pigeon-hole yourself.

"The AEC program gives students so many tangible skills that make students stand out. Highlight your design or video work. It makes a difference."

## Century Farmers, continued from page 10

studied Agricultural Communications at the University of Florida in the mid-1990s.

“Everything I learned in college I am applying in my job,” Freel said.

Freel works every day to help increase the general public’s awareness that agriculture is more than growing food.

“Farmers and ranchers are too busy dealing with the unpredictable events on the farm to find time to inform the

public about what they actually do,” Freel said. “That’s where I come in and help put a pretty face on agriculture.”

In Florida the program is called the Century Pioneer Family Farm. To be recognized as a Century Pioneer Family Farm, the farm must fill out an application with the state Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

Once approved, the farm will receive a certificate of authenticity and a sign that can be posted for visitors to

see.

Freel said the best part about working on the project was “telling the untold true story of the American farmer.”

Freel hopes to continue working on more video biographies to post on the website.

“I think this is an important part of our country’s history that most Americans have no idea about and it is worth preserving,” Freel said.

## AEC professor works to further leadership in Zambia

by: Ashley Ball

Agricultural Education and Communication lecturer Marta Hartmann spent a month during summer 2011 to help educate women in Zambia about national development.

Hartmann attended an international conference in Africa and was asked to stay and participate in a month-long program with the Zambian National Women’s Lobby (ZNWL) organization.

“Zambia has played a major role in the advocacy of women’s rights issue and supporting the woman’s movement in Malawi and Kenya,” Hartmann said.

The ZNWL mission is to bridge the gender gap in political decision-making at all levels through advocacy, lobbying and leadership development, she said. ZNWL promotes equal representation and participation of all

women in Zambia in national development.

“Women are more than half of countries’ population; however, their representation in decision making is minimal,” Hartmann said. “There are very few elected officials to Parliament, as well as officers at local levels.”

She was able to help lead a three-day workshop for the women during her stay in Zambia. Some of the capacity development topics she led were coalition building, public policy advocacy, fundraising and public speaking.

Hartmann described the range of women who attended the program from young women to women who were in their 60s.

“There was a small group of older women who have been a part of the women’s rights movement for a long time,” Hartmann said.

One of Hartmann’s responsibilities was to identify emerging issues brought up by the participants throughout the workshop.

“A large effort is needed for women to assume decision-making in Parliament and public levels,” Hartmann said. “Women need to be prepared to assume these positions.”

Hartmann said that at the end of the conference the Zambian women held an African celebration of coming together, not just to finalize the ending of the program but also to thank the organization and trainers.

“The women started singing to us how grateful they were for everything they learned,” Hartmann said. “My work in Zambia was an opportunity to strengthen my own leadership skills, and learn about the people of this African nation.”



Marta Hartmann (third from right) participated in a month-long program with the Zambian National Women’s Lobby (ZNWL) organization.



# University of Florida creates new Center for Public Policy Evaluation

by:Julius Finney



Alexa Lamm

The University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has hired a recent Agricultural Education and

resource public policy from a social science perspective."

Carter and fellow AEC professor Tracy Irani decided to create such an organization at the university.

"We said, 'Here is IFAS's niche.' We could really step up and provide a level of service, not just for Florida, but nationally and internationally as well," Carter said.

She said Lamm was perfect to lead the new effort because Lamm's doctoral dissertation was on the kind of research evaluation that the NPPEC will provide.

Lamm said she developed an interest in the impact of public policy choices on agriculture while working as a 4-H agent for nine years in the Denver area.

"I loved the work," Lamm said. "I loved seeing the impact of what I did every day."

Lamm came to Gainesville and received her doctorate, she said, so that she could learn how public policy affects the "big picture."

Lamm said NPPEC will be a place

where agriculture issues are studied from the perspective of a variety of disciplines.

"The whole purpose of the project is to create a national center that can bridge disciplines," Lamm said. "It's a center that can bring people together to discuss how public policy influences the ag and natural resource sector."

Lamm said that NPPEC will bring together agriculture economists, nutrition specialists and community development officers and offer them a place to evaluate what will happen as the result of different public policy choices.

Lamm and Carter say that they want NPPEC to be a resource for other research institutions and for legislators as they formulate policy.

"We want to be able to measure impact so that when future policy comes into consideration," Lamm said. "We can say, 'These are the social, economic, and environmental consequences of similarly implemented policies.' We would really like to be a resource for future decision making."

Communication graduate to create a research center designed to evaluate public policy decisions related to agricultural and natural resources.

IFAS hired Alexa Lamm, who recently received her doctorate with a specialization in extension education, focusing on research evaluation methodology, to lead this new effort.

IFAS's National Public Policy Evaluation Center will study the economic, environmental and social impacts of current and future public policy initiatives involving agricultural and natural resources on U.S. consumers, coordinating the efforts of researchers from UF's social and biophysical science departments.

While a great many organizations are involved with agricultural and natural resource policy issues, from state and federal lawmakers to numerous private interest groups, Lamm said, until now, no neutral organization was able to provide unbiased research-based evaluation of these kinds of public policy issues.

"We found there were a lot of organizations who formulate policy," said Hannah Carter, AEC assistant professor and director of UF's Wedgworth Leadership Institute, "but no one who had created an entity to evaluate agriculture and natural





**Save the Date:** Coming Home to AEC

**When:** Saturday, April 7, starting at 4 p.m.

**Where:** Alto and Patricia Straughn IFAS Extension Professional Development Center (2412 Shealy Drive, Gainesville) (Near the Animal Sciences Building, south of Archer Road).

**What:** The first Department of Agricultural Education and Communication Alumni Event. Bring the family to enjoy catching up with fellow AEC alumni. This is also the day of the Orange & Blue game at 1 p.m. and UF vs. LSU in baseball at 7 p.m. (tentative). So it'll be a full day of Gator activities and remembrances.

**More Info:** Visit the AEC website at [aec.ifas.ufl.edu](http://aec.ifas.ufl.edu) or look us up on Facebook for updates.

**See you there!**