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Spring 2013 Ag Council Report

This school year has been a busy and fulfilling one for the AGNR Student Council.

The fall semester started off quickly with the AGNR Fall Bash, which Ag Council helped promote and put on. Alpha Gamma Rho grilled the food and we had a great turn out of over a hundred people!

The next major event of the semester was the 2nd AGNR Faculty debate in early November. Featuring the topic of ‘How do we feed the world’s population?’ we packed the lecture hall with over 120 students in attendance! This was more than quadruple the attendance of the first debate.

The first event of the spring semester was the 3rd AGNR Faculty Debate in early March, which highlighted Food Misconceptions. The debate audience grew in size again to over 140 people and the panel provided students with unique prospects from different parts of the Ag Industry.

As summer is quickly approaching Ag Council is preparing for Ag Day at the end of April and the annual Ag Council Banquet on May 8th.

Ag Day provides our clubs with the opportunity to interact with and educate the public while our banquet allows us to honor some people who make this the best college on campus and gives students the chance to network with people thorough out the college. I am proud of how many great events Ag Council sponsored this year and I cannot wait to see where it goes in the future!

- Ag Council President, Tim Von Thun

FROM THE DESK OF DR. LEON SLAUGHTER

What do these three words have in common—sharks, shaman, and estrogen? The three words partially describe the adventures of three AGNR students who are making the most of their undergraduate experience through research, study abroad, and community service. One of the elements of the President’s Promise program encourages every UM student to take the opportunity to broaden his or her educational experience through activities outside the regular classroom. In AGNR, the Promise is taken seriously. We encourage students to take the challenge and step outside their comfort zone, and in some instances, we support them through scholarships. What follows are stories about AGNR students who have done some amazing things as they enliven and enrich their educational odyssey. I encourage all of you to take advantage of the President’s Promise and be fearless.
Swimming with Sharks

For some, the idea of swimming with sharks might sound terrifying. But for junior nutrition major Daniel Mongeon, it was an experience that ultimately helped him decide what he wants to do with the rest of his life.

Mongeon spent last semester working as a research assistant for three PhD students at the Bimini Biological Field Station (BBFS) on the island South Bimini in the Bahamas. Some of his responsibilities there included observing, tagging and measuring sharks, taking their DNA samples and isotopes, as well as fishing for and feeding them.

“The research being done when I was there was about lemon sharks’ social interactions, daily caloric output of nurse sharks, and repetitive daily activity of lemon sharks,” Mongeon said.

During his three months away on the island, Mongeon spent over 100 hours observing these sharks.

His decision to go abroad was fueled primarily by a desire to figure out his post-graduation plans. Before leaving, Mongeon planned on attending medical school. However, his love for sharks tempted him to change his major to environmental science, so that he could go on to graduate school and specialize in shark biology and conservation.

“One of my favorite memories from my time on the island is swimming with sharks; every month I had the chance to free swim – without cages – with Caribbean Reef sharks and blacknose sharks.

“We would be in the water with 10 to 13 sharks, 5 to 8 feet mostly, and just swim around with them,” he said.

Other notable experiences from his trip include swimming with wild bottle-nosed and wild spotted dolphins, and a free swim with a 13-foot tiger shark. He also got to swim with some bull sharks he helped catch.

Mongeon recommends the experience to other students interested in sharks, but explains that it might not be for everyone. The island has two bars, 80 year round residents and an unreliable Internet connection.

“It’s not a resort island, and you are there to work. It won’t be a vacation,” he said. “But if you like conservation, living near water, boating and beautiful weather, it is the place for you.”

Now that he’s back at UMD, Mongeon plans to continue working to get a degree in nutrition and apply to medical school, while still being an active shark conservationist. He’s also ready to go back to South Bimini, and plans to spend an additional four months there next fall, continuing his work as a research assistant.

Student Research to be Presented at International Conference

AGNR’s very own Aikeen Jones is making waves in the science world with his new reproduction research.

Jones, a senior majoring in animal science with a concentration in animal care and management, has been researching a method to culture feline seminiferous tubules in vitro, a fertilization process by which an egg is fertilized by sperm outside the body.

“Successful results could potentially lead to the creation of viable felid spermatogonia in the lab,” said Jones of his research.

His research was made possible by Dr. Leon Slaughter, who gave Jones departmental funds to purchase hormones and various chemicals needed to create the culture environment.

Others involved in his research are his academic advisor, Dr. Ed Orlando, his lab advisor and principal investigator, Dr. Carol Keefer, as well as Dr. Lindsey Vansandt, Dr. Sarah Balcom and Dr. Pierre Commizzoli of the Smithsonian Zoo.

“Dr. Sarah Balcom is the one who pointed me in the right direction,” Jones said. “After taking her repro class I fell in love with the topic.”

Jones explains that he later became a teaching assistant some reproduction-related classes, and then asked Vansandt and Keefer if he could join their lab.

“I was lucky enough that they actually liked me and said yes,” he said.

Looking forward, Jones is still unsure about what he’d like to do in the future. Passionate about animal reproduction, though, he hopes to eventually attend graduate school in that field. For now, Jones is focusing his attention on continuing his research.

Recently, the Society for the Study of Reproduction accepted his research abstract and Jones will be presenting his findings at their international conference in Montreal this July.
For many college students, winter vacation is one of the most highly anticipated times of year. After a semester of quizzes and papers, midterms and finals, they get to take a well-deserved break and return home to their families.

Some students spend their weeks of freedom catching up with high school friends, some try to find a job to keep them busy, and others decide to spend their vacation time abroad.

This past January, junior Nutritional Science/Pre-Medicine major Brook Hyman spent four weeks in Peru, participating in a program run by Child Family Health International (CFHI), a global health nonprofit organization.

While abroad, Hyman lived with a host family and volunteered at a local kindergarten, a maternity hospital, and a clinic serving teen mothers.

“I also took Spanish classes and did some traveling on the weekends,” she said. Hyman particularly enjoyed working in the pediatrics unit of the adolescent clinic. Her supervisor, Dra. Carrera, did a lot of work with newborns, and would occasionally let Hyman listen to their heartbeats through a stethoscope.

“There was one baby who had congenital heart failure and when listening, I could actually tell that she has a murmur and that her heart was beating too fast,” she said.

Before she went abroad, Hyman planned on practicing medicine, but wasn’t set on any specific kind of medicine. However, after just one month in South America, she felt so inspired by her experience that she decided to narrow her focus to international medicine.

She warns interested students, though, that they should have an idea of what they’re getting themselves into before they sign up.

Now that she’s home, Hyman is busy filling out medical school applications, preparing for the MCAT and working at a hospital. She also hopes to participate in another CFHI program, and highly recommends the program to other students.

“If you are anything but Latino in Ecuador, you are immediately in the minority, which can contribute to the culture shock,” she explained. “I personally found it super scary because I am also female and was the target of a lot of unwanted attention, but I felt like it was also good for me to be exposed to that type of experience.”

“I would recommend this trip to anyone with an open mind and a strong sense of adventure,” she said. “There is a lot to learn by immersing yourself in a new culture, and so many new experiences to take advantage of.”
Check out the office hours of our AGNR Peer Mentors! Visit Tim, Sindu, Stephanie, Hanum, Chris, Lisa and Lindsey today in 0100 or 0107 Symons Hall.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Office Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tim Von Thun (AGST)</td>
<td>Tues 12pm-1pm, or Thurs 9:30am-12:30pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sindu Manoharan (ANSC)</td>
<td>Mon 11:50am-1:50pm or Wed 10am-12pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stephanie Marino (LARC)</td>
<td>Tues 2pm-4pm or Thurs 3pm-5pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Kaufman (NFSC)</td>
<td>Thurs 2pm-3pm or Fri 12pm-3pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hanum Wensil-Strow (ANSC/ENSP)</td>
<td>Mon 10am-11am or Weds 10am-11am, 12pm-2pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Riley (ENSP)</td>
<td>Mon 11am-3pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey Yarbrough (NFSC)</td>
<td>Mon 2:30pm-4:30pm or Weds 9am-11am</td>
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