



## **CI Student Service Trip to New Orleans a Real Learning Experience**

Camarillo, Calif. April 19, 2010 - Since the fall of 2005, when Hurricane Katrina struck an unsuspecting New Orleans with savage force, students from CSU Channel Islands (CI) have returned annually to the city during their Spring Break to renew their commitment to the city's recovery.

The trip is part of the service learning component of the Environmental Science and Resource Management (ESRM) program. An interdisciplinary program designed for students interested in environmental topics, it provides education and exposure to both scientific and human aspects of environment issues.

"Service Learning in New Orleans", is in its fourth year and is an extremely popular course open to all majors. This year CI's student and faculty contingent to New Orleans included several students from Oregon State University and two of their professors, eager to be a part of the excursion. A professor from Loyola Marymount University and a representative from the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Foundation also participated.

Assistant Professor of Environmental Science and Resource Management, Dr. Sean Anderson, prepared student participants for the intense twelve-day field course in and around New Orleans with pre-trip lectures and preparation. Once in New Orleans, they studied factors that led to the man-made disaster. Students had the advantage of interacting with local experts, survivors, and residents and assessed the ongoing disruptions to daily life and the lingering impacts of poor coastal resource management.

They studied the previous and current levee flood protection system built by the Army Corps of Engineers. This is particularly relevant as much of Ventura County's water supply from the San Francisco-San Joaquin Bay Delta is protected by a nearly identical levee system designed by the same engineers and with the same technology that failed catastrophically in New Orleans.

Students were also exposed to the human side of life in New Orleans. After having returned to the area for four consecutive years, many friendships have been established with residents, well-known chefs, and musicians. The CI group is always warmly welcomed and recognized for the work commitment their members have made to the city and environs.

The work portion of the trip involved working on wetland restoration projects in Belle Chase's Woodlands Trail and Park, one of the few remnant bottomland hardwood forests surrounding Greater New Orleans. In the past students also worked on building projects, such as last year's work repairing a school. Anderson said that, "There was a 10-inch

rainfall in a 4-hour time frame and the students were working outside. It was a little stressful."

This year Anderson explained that the group worked on projects involving the food system and providing access to sustainable sources of nutrition. They cooperated with New Orleans Food and Farm Network, a non-profit that helps to establish urban gardens and trains residents to grow their own healthy food in community garden plots. Students, working with Hollygrove Market and Farm, helped prep land for planting in the community garden.

Students learned more about Louisiana through its food by attending a class at the acclaimed New Orleans School of Cooking. They bought their ingredients at the local farmers' markets and then learned to prepare some tasty gumbo. The evenings were spent getting a chance to sample New Orleans' cuisine and listening to great jazz, rewards for what Anderson described as exhausting physical labor during the days. He said, "I'm proud that five of our students have gone back on their own to volunteer and one student from last year's class is contemplating moving back there on a permanent basis. This trip gives students a real world context for classroom learning."

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*CI Mission Statement*

*Placing students at the center of the educational experience, California State University Channel Islands provides undergraduate and graduate education that facilitates learning within and across disciplines through integrative approaches, emphasizes experiential and service learning, and graduates students with multicultural and international perspectives.*