Fall 2009

Fall 2009, Through UNH EcoQuest program student discovers practical applications and "new level of being"

Kristen Lindquist
University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/international_news

Recommended Citation
Lindquist, Kristen, "Fall 2009, Through UNH EcoQuest program student discovers practical applications and "new level of being"
https://scholars.unh.edu/international_news/77
Fall 2009, Through UNH EcoQuest program student discovers practical applications and "new level of being"
THROUGH UNH EcoQuest program student discovers practical applications and "a new level of being"

by Kirsten Lindquist ’10

English and environmental conservation studies major Kirsten Lindquist spent fall semester 2008 on the UNH EcoQuest program in New Zealand.

I was terrified. My heart beat madly and my brain struggled against panic mode. I’m scared of deep, dark water—and there I was in my snorkel gear, poised to slip into the watery abyss from the back of a deep sea charter boat. And yet, I was determined to follow my curiosity, piqued by our recent classes on marine ecosystems in New Zealand. I gripped my friend’s hand nervously as we simultaneously slid in the cool, briny water off the Poor Knights Islands. And was I glad I went under; it was beautiful, fascinating and exquisite in an alien way down there in Nursery Cove. I truly felt as if I had just discovered a new world. It was by holding sea salps -- flickering a myriad of neon colors, seeing the spines of a lionfish up close, and swimming with the blue mao mao, that I truly understood the importance of the marine protection area policy we’d been studying in the classroom.

That moment of connection is much of what I feel EcoQuest is about. There, learning is not just about what you absorb in the classroom. It’s about experiencing hands on the real-world implications of concepts learned in lecture, and seeing how that knowledge can be applied to make a positive difference. My directed research project—monitoring the Hochstetter’s frog in different pest control zones within the Hunua Ranges—was not only an amazing adventure of shimmying up waterfalls and hiking up rivers in search of a cute and elusive amphibian. It was the first time a school project actually had implications beyond a grade; the population data collected by our team are now available to the New Zealand Department of Conservation to help them in future pest management decisions. I was ecstatic that what I did at school was making a difference!

At Ecoquest I also discovered learning as a new way of life and a way of interacting with and appreciating others. There is a classroom on campus; a room that also functions as a living room, dining room and study room. But our lessons were not firmly tied to class, or even field trips. Class may have ended before dinner, but I would find myself in an impromptu constellation tutorial come nightfall. And I was surprised to
find that walking on the beach and watching the colors of the Firth of Thames shift with the tide and the day was inspirational and crucial to my learning experience. No class at UNH had ever promoted such space for reflection and immersion in the landscape. This, for me, was a new level of being.

As I write this, the newest EcoQuest team is getting ready for their flight to Auckland. I still reel at how much has changed in my life since I made that same trip a year ago. Of course, I am also envious. My memories of EcoQuest and New Zealand still remain distinct and vivid after these complicated months of readjustment to school, to home. That is what happens, I think, when you live and learn fully; what happens when you allow a place and its people to make an imprint in your mind and heart. It is what happened to me at EcoQuest. And this vibrant state of being is its greatest gift I keep with me, one that is ever growing in how I think, how I see and how I exist.