



Fall 2009

EnviroBits

Alumni newsletter of the Illinois State University Environmental Health Program

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Environmental Health Program enrollment is up

Ninety students are enrolled as environmental health majors at Illinois State University, nearly double the count from three years ago. One of the factors contributing to the increase is a rising interest in the environment, particularly in global climate change. Energy efficiency and alternative energy sources are important new topics in a number of our courses.

While the Environmental Health Program has taken several steps in recent years to increase recruiting, student survey data tells us that the number one reason why they enter the major is our alumni. Students cite a friend or family member who is a student or graduate of the Environmental Health Program as the most common source of information leading to their enrollment. Thanks, alumni! Keep sending prospective students our way.

Internship program

Workplace internships remain a keystone of the Environmental Health Program. Based on employer reports, students continue to provide high value and quickly become part of the environmental health teams wherever they work. According to the students, the hands-on experience is an invaluable way to put learning and knowledge to practice in the field.

Last summer, one of our seniors, Jacob Weakley, had an internship with the Peoria Area OSHA Office. Even those of us with years of experience might have benefited from the opportunity to walk in Weakley's shoes.

"My summer internship with OSHA was a great learning experience," he said. "What I liked most was the fact that each day was different, and it was very diverse. Over the course of my internship I visited sites ranging from mom-and-pop shops to multi-billion-dollar corporations. On most days I had my pick of going along with safety specialists, industrial hygienists, compliance educators, or whistleblower investigators.

"The flexibility of my supervisor and internship coordinator made



Dana Schultz, second from left, is pictured with some of the officers and mentors she worked with during her internship with the Indian Health Service in Arizona.

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What's new in Environmental Health?



We are pleased to announce a record-breaking number of declared majors in the Environmental Health Program with 90 full-time students. Illinois State is home to one of only 31 programs officially recognized and accredited by The National Environmental Health Science & Protection Accreditation Council (EHAC). At a time when many other programs and universities are struggling to keep enrollment even, Illinois State remains strong, mostly as a testament to the dedication and commitment of the faculty and continued support of the alums.

This fall a new faculty member was added to the team. Thomas P. Fuller began as assistant professor and program director in August. Fuller earned his doctorate of science in industrial hygiene at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He also has a master of science in public health from the Environmental Engineering Department at The University of North Carolina, and an M.B.A. from Suffolk University in Boston. A certified industrial hygienist, he is chair of the Nonionizing Radiation Committee with the American Industrial Hygiene Association. Besides electromagnetic radiation, Fuller's other academic and technical interests include exposures to hazardous medications and infectious agents to healthcare workers. He is also a member of the Industrial Hygiene Value Added Business Strategy Team at the AIHA.



Thomas P. Fuller

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it possible for me to gear the internship toward my own needs. With ample opportunities in general industry and construction, I chose inspection opportunities that would give me experience with both safety and industrial hygiene.”

Another intern, Dana Schultz, worked through the COSTEP program at the Eastern Arizona District Office and Phoenix Area Indian Health Service. Schultz worked in the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering in Lakeside, Arizona. According to Schultz it seemed like an invaluable life experience.

“Over the course of the summer I was able to participate in a variety of activities, including food surveys, institutional surveys, injury-prevention data collection, three rabies clinics and three Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF) prevention campaigns. My favorite of those activities were the rabies clinics and RMSF activities. It was so great to work directly with tribal members and learn first-hand some of the American Indian culture.”

If you are in a position to hire an Illinois State intern for spring or summer sessions, or you know someone who is, please contact Thomas Fuller at (309) 438-5142 or write to tfulle2@ilstu.edu. It's a win-win opportunity for everyone involved.

Alumni update

Each year the Environmental Health Program invites an alum back for Homecoming to participate in special events with President Al Bowman, speak to our students, and catch up with the department faculty and staff. Last

year our alumni guest of the year was CDR William (Casey) Crump '93. Crump is the district environmental health supervisor at the Bemidji Area of the Indian Health Service and lead associate recruiter for the United States Public Health Service. Crump oversees a program designed to assess and improve environmental conditions for American Indian tribes in Wisconsin and Michigan.

Last summer Casey supervised intern Claire Nachowicz, assigning her to a project to improve the waste recycling programs on two Indian reservations in Wisconsin. Tribal environmental officials were very pleased with Nachowicz's work.

Tom Bierma and Guang Jin

Tom Bierma and Guang Jin have been collaborating on a number of bioenergy research projects. Under a grant from the U.S. Department of Energy, they have been working with the University's Agriculture Department to study the use of switchgrass to make methane in anaerobic digesters. Switchgrass is a native prairie grass that produces dense biomass without annual replanting and requires little fertilizer or pesticide application. With a generous gift from The Omron Foundation (facilitated by Kevin Bulatek, '93), Bierma and Jin have also been working to establish a biodiesel production facility



Jin and Bierma harvesting switchgrass at the Illinois State University Horticulture Center.

at Illinois State to take waste vegetable oil from the dining halls and convert it to biodiesel for campus vehicles. In a related project, funded by the National Science Foundation, Jin and Bierma are collaborating with faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University and Heartland Community College to incorporate the science of biodiesel production into general education courses for non-science majors.

George Byrns

Last spring, George Byrns drove 10 environmental health students to the Chicago section of the American Industrial Hygiene Association's annual student research competition. A poster submitted by Amanda Landers and Ion Campoli took first place in the undergraduate category.

Byrns was a faculty mentor for 43 students on an Alternative Spring Break service project to the National Park Service, Biscayne National Park. The purpose was

to do beach cleanup on several islands off the coast of Florida that serve as endangered turtle habitat. After the trip, he was recognized as the winner of the Fabulous Faculty Staff Award.

Also in 2009, Byrns finished a book, *Hazard Recognition and Control in Institutional Settings: A Guide for Hospitals, Universities and Nursing Homes*, published by the American Society of Safety Engineers. The book is being used in the course HSC 254-Control of Institutional Environments.

Byrns also has been active with the American Industrial Hygiene Association's Healthcare Working Group. He is the group's vice chair and Occupational Health Project team leader.



George Byrns

It's all about the students

Travel

With contributions of \$1,500 from the Chicago AIHA section, and \$1,500 from the Prairie AIHA section, three students were able to travel to the annual American Industrial Hygiene Conference and Exposition in Toronto. As can be seen from the photo, Jacob Weakley, Steve Jekka, and Adam Souter seemed to have had a very good time with Professor George Byrns. Thank you to the sections for the support. It is really a great opportunity for these young people to experience the conference. They all greatly appreciated the support.

Student research

Eleven students have been involved in bioenergy-related research in 2009. Most are working in the bioenergy laboratory using bench-top anaerobic digesters to quantify the amount of methane that can be generated when using switchgrass, a native prairie grass, as a feedstock. Other students have been working on a project, funded by the Omron Foundation, to create a biodiesel production capability on campus and to provide outreach to the campus and community on bioenergy opportunities in the Midwest.



George Byrns, Adam Sauter, Steve Jeka, and Jacob Weakley attending the 3M reception at the American Industrial Hygiene Conference and Exposition in Toronto.



Students explaining bioenergy at an Earth Day event in a local high school.



Students setting up anaerobic digester equipment in the bioenergy laboratory.

Awards

A number of Environmental Health students earned recognition for outstanding performance on contributions during the 2008–2009 school year, including:

Amanda Landers–Heinz B. Russelmann Scholarship

Landers is an honors student who has also been a teaching assistant, a student research assistant, and leader in the University’s ECO club. She has been working with Guang Jin and Tom Bierma on renewable energy from algae, waste vegetable oil, and switchgrass.



Amanda Landers and Tom Bierma

Ashley McIlwee–Environmental Health Discovery Scholarship

The Environmental Health Discovery Scholarship assists students who decide later in their college careers to become environmental health majors. This year’s winner was Ashley McIlwee. McIlwee learned about environmental health in spring 2007 while participating in the Alternative Spring Break service project for the National Park Service in the Florida Everglades. She initially planned to minor in environmental health but later discovered she had a passion for the field and became an Environmental Health major in fall 2008. The Environmental Health Discovery Scholarship is funded by George Byrns. The recipient wins up to \$500 per semester for up to four semesters to be used on educational expenses.



Ashley McIlwee and George Byrns

Steve Jeka and Ashley McIlwee–Omron Bioenergy Scholars

Jeka and McIlwee received \$3,000 scholarships to work on establishing a campus biodiesel program, from collection of waste vegetable oil from dining halls to blending biodiesel for use in campus vehicles. The scholarships have been provided through a gift from the Omron Foundation.



Jeka and McIlwee take waste oil samples from the Bone Student Center to test for quality.

Keep in touch

If something new has happened to you or another alumnus you know, please let us know. E-mail us with your news or fill out the form and return it to our department.

As we begin another school year, the Environmental Health Program faculty wants to thank our alumni for the many efforts made each year to support the program and stay connected. Your professional achievements and service mean a great deal to us. We want to hear what is happening with each of you.

Please stay connected to the Environmental Health Program. There are a number of ways that you can share your knowledge and expertise:

- Be a guest speaker in the classroom or for student clubs
- Serve as a mentor to one of our students as he/she completes professional practice
- Attend conferences and network with other alumni, faculty, and students

No matter when you graduated or what you are doing, you will always be a part of the Environmental Health Program and the Department of Health Sciences. You can reach us through our Web site www.HealthSciences.ilstu.edu or by calling the department at (309) 438-8329.

To learn more about Homecoming 2009, visit www.IllinoisStateHomecoming.com.



We want to hear from you!

Fill out the form and mail it to Illinois State University, Department of Health Sciences, Environmental Health Program, Campus Box 5200, Normal, IL 61790-5200 or visit our Web site at www.HealthSciences.ilstu.edu.

Name (maiden if appropriate) _____

Graduation year(s) and degree(s) _____

Mailing address _____

City, state, zip _____

Phone () _____ E-mail _____

Your news _____

This document is available in alternative formats upon request by contacting Thomas P. Fuller at (309) 438-5142.

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