

Stockton Students to Gain Global Perspectives Through Field Experience to Brazil, Volunteer Project in Zimbabwe

Stockton's Nationally Recognized Sustainability Program Offers Unconventional Education for an Uncertain Future

For Immediate Release; all names CQ; Photo of Tait Chirenje

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Galloway, N.J. – A field experience to Brazil this January and a volunteer effort providing 40,000 books to students in Zimbabwe will offer global perspectives to students studying Sustainability at Stockton University, helping to expand their cultural awareness and exposure to international environmental issues.

Tait Chirenje, associate professor of Environmental Studies, teaches a course in the Sustainability program called "International Sustainable Development," which alternates between field experiences to Ecuador and Brazil each January. In 2017, students will travel to Brazil visiting Manaus to study the Amazon River and rainforest issues, Curitiba to study urban planning and sustainability, Iguazu Falls to study energy and Rio de Janeiro to study water quality and natural resource conservation.

During the fall semester, students prepared for the trip by researching the sites they will visit and by hiking through Ricketts Glenn in Pennsylvania for a bonding experience.

"Stockton's Sustainability faculty agrees that the future will hold challenges related to growing energy demands, increasing need for livable communities and challenges to public health. To help students meet these challenges, Stockton has developed new initiatives in sustainability education that encourage innovation, cultural awareness, a global perspective and creativity," said Patrick Hossay, associate professor of Sustainability and coordinator of the degree program.

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International field experiences enable students to witness real-life issues firsthand, broadening their education and better preparing them for the future. Sustainability is a global issue, and Stockton faculty are connecting classroom concepts across the continents.

While in Brazil, students will hike through natural areas to observe biodiversity, go birding with local rangers, take a boat down the Amazon River, visit urban parks and beaches, tour green infrastructure and landscaping, visit an ecomuseum, eat local cuisine and meet with university and city officials.

Over the past 12 years, Chirenje and Hossay have led field experiences that follow the Colorado River, taking students to more than 20 national parks and monuments in 20 states to learn about water, energy and natural resource issues in the west. These experiences have evolved into international travels studying environmental issues on a global scale.

For many students, these trips are their first time traveling abroad. Emily Dolhansky, a 2016 Environmental Science graduate who is currently studying Forest Science at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, said that the field experience in Ecuador helped her to attain her dream of traveling abroad before turning 25. She visited the Mindo Cloud Forest, which she called “one of the most unique places I have ever visited” and entered the Pacific Ocean for the first time in the Galapagos Islands, alongside sea lions. The water was so clear she could see 20 feet to the bottom, she said.

Sydne Hunter, a Sustainability major who also traveled to Ecuador, explained in a blog post, “I returned to the United States with more confidence, knowledge and awareness than I left with, and above all else, a desire to explore the whole world, now that I've had a taste.”

To see photos and read more student blog experiences, visit the [Brazil](#) blogs and the [Ecuador](#) blogs.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) recognized the exceptional work of Stockton's faculty and students by awarding Stockton the inaugural Excellence & Innovation Award for Sustainability and Sustainable Development in September of this year. Stockton is featured in an AASCU [video](#) starting at minute 9:17.

The momentum continues with an effort to establish an international sustainable development minor. Stockton is building relationships with universities around the world. Stockton has signed memorandums of agreement with the Federal University of Technology Parana in Curitiba, Brazil, one of the world's greenest cities, and with Bindura University of Science Education in Bindura, Zimbabwe. The educational and cultural collaborations will allow student and faculty exchanges between Stockton and the universities, internship opportunities and implementation of community development projects.

Chirenje, who grew up in Zimbabwe, started the [Zimbabwe Book Project](#) to collect books from different parts of the world to send to deserving, underserved students in the African nation's rural schools. In two years, more than 40,000 books were collected, many from local schools including Ocean City High School and Galloway schools. They will be shipped to Zimbabwe in January.

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A Philadelphia charter school that closed in 2015 donated about 12,000 books.

Zimbabwe has the highest adult literacy rate in Africa (90 percent), but in rural regions, access to academic resources is very limited. Chirenje, who runs his own non-governmental organization called the Gaia Environmental Trust, visited students in Zimbabwe over the summer, and will return after the spring semester to distribute the donated books to those with the greatest need with help from the trust.

Stockton students and volunteers have worked to collect, transport, organize and store the books. A [fundraising](#) effort is currently underway to raise the funds for shipment.

Locally, students work on the campus sustainable farm powered by solar and irrigated by rain water, conduct energy audits at local businesses and schools, collect survey data to analyze usage of wildlife management areas and compost fruit and vegetable pulp from Greens and Grains in Galloway and coffee grinds from campus.

“We are training students for jobs that don’t yet exist, using technology that hasn’t been developed, to solve problems that aren’t fully recognized. A traditional curriculum won’t do it. We are providing an unconventional education for an uncertain future,” explained Hossay.

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