Researching Lizard Malaria in California

The opportunity for mutual learning experiences through undergraduate research, especially research that takes Penn State York students and professors out of the comfort zones of the classroom and laboratories and immerses them into the rawness that is field research, is what Dr. Anne Vardo-Zalik loves most about her job. Vardo-Zalik shared that together, she and the two students, Josh Wolgamuth and Huntur Woodard, who accompanied her, learned the importance of teamwork, patience, and having a wacky sense of humor.

Woodard learned that through this two-week adventure in field research, he could be a good team member, a good friend, and handle California’s blistering sun in the daytime and scorpions at night. He shared, “I was thrown into the wilderness to catch lizards with a fishing rod, and I learned how important patience and determination are to succeed through the constant trials of man vs lizard.”

For Wolgamuth, what started as a fascination for lizards as a young boy, has become a beautiful moment, as a college student, where he relived his childhood excitement by planning, organizing, and executing a ten-day lizard malaria research project – a far cry from his early experiences in his backyard. This will be Wolgamuth’s final research trip with Vardo-Zalik and he shares, “My favorite experience was working with Elias and inspiring the next generation of young researchers. This trip and research will forever hold a special place in my heart.”

Man versus lizard with a fishing rod.

Dr. Anne Vardo-Zalik, associate professor of biology, Josh Wolgamuth, Huntur Woodard, back row left to right, with Elias Vargas at the research station.

Man versus lizard with a fishing rod.

Huntur Woodard works with one of the lizards.
Alternative Spring Break is an opportunity for students to travel to a devastated area of the country and give up their spring break of relaxation for the satisfaction of helping others. This past March, thirteen Penn State York students joined forces with students from across the country, visiting Wilmington, North Carolina, to assist families still trying to recover months after Hurricane Florence.

Noah Pak knew none of his Penn State companions, nor any of the other student volunteers, when he began this adventure. He learned quickly that they all had the same mission of giving their energy to help others rebuild their homes and lives. Pak’s experience included donning a yellow hazmat suit with a respirator, and working beneath a home to remove damaged air conditioning pipes. After climbing out of the tight and dirty conditions, the homeowner couldn’t stop thanking him. Pak said he would never forget how appreciative the family was, as he reflected on how grateful he felt to have a home unaffected by the hurricane.

Carolyn Kunkel tells about their assignment to work on a home with mold growing in the insulation and drywall. The homeowner shared that he was juggling caring for his sick wife with negotiating claims with the insurance company. Just as he was giving up on the house, he got the call that student volunteers were coming to help. The team spent several days working on this project, removing all the drywall and insulation in the home and preparing it for the next step towards rebuilding. Kunkel shared that growing closer together as a team was the best part, and that the experience changed her perspective on life and has made her want to do more in her community.

In addition to their residential work, the Penn State York team worked on a project for the New Hanover Humane Society. They painted a shed at the shelter, and of course they painted it blue and white!

When you ask the student affairs staff chaperones, Scott Simonds and Sheri Yoder, what impressed them the most about this diverse team of students, they share two thoughts: the students’ willingness to give of themselves, with seemingly no end in sight, and the students’ strong work ethic combined with their compassion for others really moved us.
Graham Center Executive in Residence Speaks to the Graduating Class – Spring 2019

Graham Center Executive in Residence (EIR), Graham and Campus Advisory Board member, and Commencement Speaker Bill Yanavitch wore many hats for Penn State York this past year. His commitment to supporting Penn State York students was the theme that tied these four roles together.

Yanavitch found time, while establishing and growing his own consulting business, to represent The Graham Center in the community: finding new internship opportunities, introducing our students to phenomenal business leaders through the speaker series, and increasing the Center’s corporate partner ranks by building relationships with new companies.

The wisdom Yanavitch shared with students during the commencement ceremony was based on his life experiences. He had four pieces of advice in discovering new paths and blazing new trails: 1) Be a learning machine; 2) Be resilient and learn from failures, tough lessons, and heartache; 3) Be family; and 4) Be grateful and giving by recognizing that we all receive help throughout our journeys and we must give back and help others. He concluded with a reminder to dream big, blaze your own trails, and create new stories.

In the Spirit of Blue and White. . . Embrace the Magic of Water and Light

Penn State York’s Alumni and Development team held an event for Central Florida alumni in Disney’s Animal Kingdom on March 9. Our attendees shared blue and white memories and enjoyed sweet treats at an ice cream reception, Disney’s sticky bun bread pudding, tasting as close to grilled stickies as you can get, topped with Sticky Bun ice cream shipped in from the Penn State Berkey Creamery. Afterwards, our alums were treated to reserved seats at the Animal Kingdom’s River of Lights show. Special thanks to Kristy Altland, York alumna and Disney event manager, for sharing her Disney hospitality with our entire group.

Coordinating the event on behalf of the York campus was Joshua Wolgamuth, a junior biology major at Penn State York, the current Alumni and Development intern, and a student researcher whose work is focused on lizards. This was Wolgamuth’s first visit to Disney World and Kristy Altland worked her magic to provide a one-of-a-kind visit to the Disney Nutrition and Veterinary Center. Wolgamuth met the senior veterinarian team, toured the on-property labs, and learned about the level of preparation and care that goes into the daily operations for the animals at Animal Kingdom. Wolgamuth said, “Hands down, my favorite part was the emergency visit by a lizard that came into the veterinary hospital. I was smiling from ear-to-ear as the staff worked to diagnose the situation and answer my questions. That was truly Disney magic.”
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The groundbreaking ceremony on Wednesday, April 17, atop the hillside between the Pullo Family Performing Arts Center (The Pullo Center) and the Main Classroom Building, signaled the beginning of the construction project to build the Graham Center for Innovation and Collaboration at Penn State York. Thanks to generous support from Donald Graham, York business leader and philanthropist; John and Maria Polli, local philanthropists; two local foundations, the Powder Mill Foundation and the J. Warehime Foundation; and the University, The Graham Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership Studies (The Graham Center) will have a new home. “Don has long been a wonderful advocate for advancing entrepreneurship and innovation at Penn State and across the region,” said Penn State President Eric Barron. “He has led by example, and we are deeply grateful for all his incredible leadership and commitment to Penn State students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding community.” “The Graham Center for Collaboration and Innovation will transform the Penn State York campus. It will provide a permanent home for our growing Graham Fellows program and allow the campus to offer new entrepreneurial leadership programs open to every student on our campus,” said David Christiansen, chancellor of Penn State York. “The addition of the Graham Center building is a visible reminder of the partnership between Penn State and Donald Graham to prepare students for a successful professional career.” To follow the construction progress and learn more about the Graham Center, visit york.psu.edu/grahamcenter.
Alumni and Friends Had a Blast to Support Penn State York Athletics

Penn State York continues the tradition of bringing together Penn State fans to have a BLAST to support the campus athletics program. On May 1, 100 guests enjoyed an afternoon of orange clays, special competitions (i.e. beat the celebrity) on and off the course, demonstrations by The Sportsman’s Shop, and a great tailgate with Joe Paterno stories from our celebrity guest – Brandon Short. Short is a ’99 grad, former Nittany Lion and NFL linebacker, and serves as a current member of the University’s Board of Trustees. He took a side trip to York on his way from London to University Park for the May board meeting.

Student athletes and coaches were on hand in record numbers this year, from helping to serve lunch to manning stations on the course. They were able to share stories and information about their teams and the experiences they had this past academic year, coaching and competing. Special thanks go out to our dedicated volunteers – campus staff, alumni and friends who pull for our guests at the stations, work the registration table, and transport folks across the course to get their team photos taken.

Plans are in the works for our 2020 Sporting Clays event next May. Sponsorships are already coming in and we would love to hear from you if you want to register a team to take a shot at supporting Penn State York Athletics. Contact Di Hershey for information.

A Message From the Chancellor continued...

I am also deeply appreciative of our professional staff and the pride with which they support our students. Staff members across the campus – including the Student Affairs, Advising and Career Development, the Nittany Success Center, the Registrar’s Office, the Bursar’s Office, and Admissions, to name a few – are committed to student success. Without their support, activity on campus would quickly come to a halt. Many of our staff members also volunteer as advisers for student clubs and organizations. For instance, Barb Dennis, coordinator of publications and promotion, serves as the adviser of the THON Club here at Penn State York.

As the 2018-19 academic year came to an end, I’m excited about what we have done over the last year and I’m excited about what we have planned for 2019-20. Before we know it, students will be arriving on campus in August! In the meanwhile, I wish you a rewarding summer.

WE ARE . . . PENN STATE
David Christiansen