



Phil Brick

## *Whitties travel the West in a semester of intensive study*

Whitman launched its first Semester in the West last fall sending 23 students, three professors, and field manager Lindsey Bloom, '01, out into the field for three months to study environmental and social justice issues throughout the interior American West. "The goal of the program," said director Phil Brick, associate

**Students meet land use and other environmental issues face to face during a fall semester spent on the road.**

professor of politics, "is to integrate traditional academic learning with a series of rigorous experiences in the field."

And rigorous it was. Students traveled more than 12,000 miles to visit nearly 100 people in the field doing environmental and social justice work in the West. Students were also expected to keep up with a long list of reading designed to provide the necessary background to the issues at hand, said Brick.

After visiting with many people with a wide variety of interests and expertise, including environmental activists, members of Native American groups, loggers, ranchers, miners, and community-based conservation activists, students learned that environmental issues such as sustainable forestry, grazing, and healthy rural communities are far more complex than they imagined.

"They quickly discovered that some of the ideas they favored in academic discussions about natural resources did not play out as they expected when followed to ground," said Brick. For example, students sympathetic to water-marketing proposals to solve chronic water shortages in New Mexico learned that such proposals have hidden costs.

"The theory suggests that the market mechanism will insure that water will flow to its highest and best use, probably consumption in urban areas such as Santa Fe and Albuquerque," Brick explained. But after meetings with Hispanic land grant



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activists Maria Varela and David Benavides, students learned that the most senior water rights belonged to some of the least affluent people in the state — rural Hispanics.

"If water flowed to urban areas based solely on price, a rural way of life that existed well before the Anglo settlement of North America might vanish," Brick said. "Suddenly, water marketing, while elegant in theory, seemed much less attractive when serious cultural costs were factored into the equation.

"What made our experiences even more intense," said Brick, "is that students had the chance to write



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*Clockwise from top left, Sarah Bronstein reads a report against a mountain backdrop. John Marvel (kneeling), executive director of the Western Watersheds Project in Northern Nevada, explains a point to students during a day in the field. Holly Brooks, Amy Rice-Jones, and Professor Phil Brick collect perennial grasses. Ben Deumling and Tristan Peter-Contesse (far left) make the most of a desert classroom.*



Corey McKrill, '04

about these experiences as they were happening and share ideas with other students in regular discussion circles out in the field.”

Writing professor Paul Hoornbeek assigned regular “epiphanies,” which were shared after dinner under a starry Western sky. “Writing is the perfect complement to experiential learning because it allows students to say how they really feel about the difficult tradeoffs and contradictions they experience in the field,” noted Brick. Students also got the chance to meet several well-known western writers, including Daniel Kemmis, Judy Blunt, Ellen Meloy, Sharman

Apt Russell, and Jon Christensen. Students particularly enjoyed reading authors’ works ahead of time, Brick said, and then having the opportunity to discuss ideas with them face to face.

Students learned about ecological relationships throughout the West in two, two-week intensive ecology courses that they took on the road. Professor Mary O’Brien focused on grassland ecology in Hells Canyon, while professor Paul Arbetan took the students on an ecological tour of New Mexico, from high in the Jemez Mountains in the north to the Chihuahuan desert in the south.

“The ecology component really added a lot to the program,” said Brick. “It showed the students how scientific research is done in the field, and how such research is used in political arguments as well.”

In the end, Brick said, he hopes that some students will be inspired by their experiences to become active in Western environmental issues. “The West will need a new breed of activist if we are ever to be able to move closer toward Wallace Stegner’s goal of creating a society to match the scenery.”



Ashley Schaeffer at work on her laptop.



For Professor Phil Brick, Semester in the West began last summer when he outfitted a trailer for the trip. Among

## ON THE ROAD WITH SEMESTER IN THE WEST

By Cathy Grimes, Walla Walla Union-Bulletin, December 22, 2002.

Walla Walla residents affectionately call Whitman College students “Whitties.” But 23 Whitman juniors consider themselves “Westies,” after participating in a three-month experiment completed December 7. The students, three professors, and a field manager trekked across the inland West in three GMC Suburbans and a trailer-hauling truck, following a serpentine path through nine states.

Billed as the College’s first “Semester in the West,” the program focused on first-hand examination of land use and other issues in the arid west. Politics professor Phil Brick developed the idea last year.

Brick, who has been leading field studies programs for more than a decade, said student evaluations and alumni letters called such experiences “epiphanies,” often the most memorable part of their college careers. “Student lives have become so complicated, it is difficult to get them away from school for more than a few days,” Brick said. “Students really can’t take that kind of time away from their studies.”

The semester project solved the problem, providing classes and field work. The Westies agree with Brick’s assessment, but said the semester was more than eye-open-

ing. It was life-changing, according to participant Corey McKrill. Students embarked in October with one set of views. They returned in December with another. Junior Sarah Gilman, an art major with an interest in environmental issues, said most of the Westies initially were “pretty hard-core green environmentalists.” Politics major Kalin Schmoldt said the trip took issues out of textbooks and newspapers. “It’s pretty easy in the classroom to see things in black and white,” he said. “But you get out into the West and there is no single approach.”

Students heard from more than 80 speakers, toured mines, timber mills and ranches and attended rallies and meetings on the trek. They focused on public land use, including history, alteration of the land, property rights and water use. But the most common thread was cattle grazing on public lands, in parks and on Bureau of Land Management properties.

“Grazing was a huge issue,” Brick said. “We spent a lot of time talking to people representing the ‘other side.’ They put a face on the issue,” Gilman said. “‘I’m so confused,’ was the common theme.”

“They see that the issues get quite complicated,” Brick said. “The students ended up quite frankly liking the people” they initially vilified.

The Westies carried a full course load of classes on the trip, studying ecology, environmental politics, writing and developing indepen-

dent study projects with Brick and Whitman professors Paul Arbetan and Paul Hoornbeek. Professor Mary O’Brien worked with the students in Oregon, but did not travel with them. Their white trailer, nicknamed Further II, doubled as a study room, equipped with 17 computers and a satellite Internet link powered by six solar panels. When not in use for study, the trailer stowed camp gear, including five tents, the kitchen, duffle bags and folding chairs. The white truck, called Moby Dick, held a 100-gallon water tank for drinking, cooking and showers.

Students adapted easily to the accommodations, Brick said. They formed four work groups and rotated turns cooking and cleaning under the supervision of field manager Lindsey Bloom. Students usually slept under the stars, but on rainy nights they “pig piled” into the tents, Schmoldt said. McKrill said few students grappled with boredom.

“We were busy a lot of the time,” Schmoldt said. “We really didn’t have breaks.” Among the greatest challenges, according to McKrill, was finding places to take long, hot showers. When Moby Dick, the trailer and the Suburbans pulled into real campgrounds, students vied for access to the showers. Students scrambled to complete camp chores and studies during daylight hours. The only artificial lights were connected to Further II. Schmoldt said most people settled in for the night once darkness descended. There were other rituals, students said. The most



Chris Bishop, '79

other features, the trailer provided laptop computers and a solar-powered satellite uplink to the Internet.

obvious took place every time the group stopped to refuel. "Phil would announce, 'This is another Semester in the Minimart stop,'" Schmoldt intoned. Brick said students disembarked and headed into the store to ogle candy displays, try on sunglasses, read postcards and use the restrooms.

Most class discussions occurred during the drive. Brick said he instructed the students to "view each person as a text. Read the person then ask, 'What are you hearing? What's missing?'" Then students wrote about the speech or visit and shared the writing with peers. "It was interesting being able to hash out what different people picked up from the speakers," McKrill said.

The Westies said living and working with classmates and instructors was enjoyable. "We took really good care of each other," Gilman said. In fact, many of the Westies hope to rent a Walla Walla house together as they finish their time at Whitman. Brick said staff had as much fun as the students. "One morning in New Mexico, we were camping at 7,000 feet and we woke to snow and sleet," Brick recalled. "The students were sleeping outside and they woke up wet, but there was laughter and joy in camp. That's what made the trip memorable. Every morning I woke to the sound of laughter."

## Historian, social critic to speak at Commencement

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and social critic Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., will present the Whitman College Commencement address Sunday, May 25.

Schlesinger, who is remembered by many Americans for his years as special assistant to President John F. Kennedy, has twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for history in 1946 and for biography in 1996; he also won the National Book Award in 1966 and again in 1979. He is the author of 16 books including the bestsellers *The Imperial Presidency*, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, *The Cycles of American History*, and *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*. His most recent is his autobiography, *A Life in the 20th Century: I, Innocent Beginnings* (2000). He is also editor of various works including *Paths to American Thought* (1963) and *Running for President* (1994).

Born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1917, Schlesinger was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy and Harvard University, where he graduated summa cum laude in history in 1938. He was a Henry Fellow at Cambridge University and a member of the Society of Fellows at Harvard.

During World War II, he served in the Office of War Information, then overseas in the Office of Strategic Services. In 1946 he was appointed associate professor of history at Harvard, working his way to full professorship by 1954. In 1948, he served as Averell Harriman's special assistant in Paris in the first months of the Marshall Plan. In 1952 and 1956 he served as a member of Governor Adlai Stevenson's campaign staff. He was appointed special assistant to President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and served in the White House throughout the Kennedy administration.

In 1966, Schlesinger was a visiting fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton; he then became the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at the Graduate School of the City University of New York, retiring in 1996.

Schlesinger has been active in other aspects of public life, as well, serving as president of the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1981-84), co-chair of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute from 1983 to the present, and a member of the advisory board of the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

The father of five children, he has been married to Alexandra Emmet since 1971.



*Kennedy insider Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., will present the 2003 Commencement address.*

**A**ssistant professor of biology Ginger Withers is a new generation of biology professor. As an undergraduate she studied cells the traditional way — looking at textbook “cartoon” figures of a circle with a nucleus. As a post-doc researcher and now as a Whitman professor, she interacts with and makes movies of real cells — growing neurons, swimming paramecia, and other microscopic living matter — to bring to her students “the majesty of the living cell.”

Withers has been awarded a National Science Foundation CAREER award of \$550,000 to be used over a five-year period. The grant, given to faculty members early in their careers, is meant to encourage professors to develop new teaching approaches in the classroom while maintaining an active and state-of-the-art research experience. Withers argued in her application that although she would be working with a smaller number of students at Whitman, the award would have a higher impact here because of the caliber of Whitman students.

Withers, whose cutting-edge research on dendrite growth in brain cells could help advance our understanding of neurological disorders such as mental retardation,

## *Professor brings “majesty of the living cell” to biology students*

Parkinson’s disease, and learning disabilities, plans to use the grant to “introduce Whitman students to the living cell.” Now that researchers can sequence entire genomes, said Withers, it is vital to train new scientists to place this genetic data in the context of the living system.

“From the time I started working with live neurons (as a post-doc at the Oregon Health and Science University in Gary Banker’s lab), I’ve been blown away by the majesty of the cell. I don’t think you can truly appreciate the cell until you have the opportunity to encounter its living machinery and see beyond the cartoon view you get in a textbook.”

This static textbook view of the cell will soon be a thing of the past in Whitman biology classes. Withers plans to use funds from the CAREER grant (and some from a recent Keck grant to Whitman) to build student imaging work stations to complement her state-of-the-art work station. By combining resources from Whitman and

funds from her grant, she was able to purchase a \$100,000 microscope with live-cell imaging capability that allows her to do cutting-edge research of the same quality she did at OHSU. With Keck monies she will be able to put together four student stations that will include adaptors so cameras can attach to the microscope, digital cameras (some capable of video streams), and accompanying computers. Withers said she hopes to have some of the stations put together in time for use this semester.

Withers, who is in her second year at Whitman, shares a teaching position with her husband, Chris Wallace. Last year, before receiving funding from CAREER and Keck grants, the two biology professors teamed up in Wallace’s developmental biology class to create a time-lapse movie of a living cell. Without the proper equipment, it was tricky, but Withers and Wallace thought the experience was important, and they persevered. They not only brought a television, VCR, and video camera into class, but they hooked up a hair dryer to keep the cell warm and

### **Whitman receives \$340,000 grant for biology studies**

The W. M. Keck Foundation of Los Angeles has awarded Whitman College a \$340,000 grant to incorporate a post-genomic, integrative biology perspective into the life sciences at the College.

“We are grateful and pleased that the Keck Foundation has awarded us this generous grant,” said President Cronin. “Whitman is committed

to providing the highest quality facilities and educational experiences possible for students.”

“This grant will enable Whitman to bring the new tools and techniques of post-genomic, integrative biology into our curriculum through course work, laboratory experiences, student/faculty research, state of the art scientific equipment, and lab techni-

cal support,” added Pat Keef, dean of the faculty.

Dan Vernon, associate professor of biology and the primary science writer of the grant proposal, said he was pleasantly surprised when he received approval of the grant. He is grateful that the Keck Foundation recognized the merit of Whitman’s proposal even in tough economic times.

“Without the computers and imaging equipment this grant will provide, students wouldn’t be introduced to what they’ll soon

encounter in the real world.”

The decoding of plant and animal genomes has provided an explosion of raw data for biologists, said Vernon, but this is just a first step — the start rather than the finish. “Many of the big questions in biology in the next couple of decades will focus on genomes and gene function, and we’re updating our curriculum to meet the challenges of teaching our students this post-genomic biology.”

Ginger Withers, assistant professor of biology, who



*Ginger Withers, left, received one of the National Science Foundation's most prestigious awards for new faculty members, a CAREER grant of \$550,000. "We're very proud and pleased to have Ginger here at Whitman," said Pat Keef, dean of the faculty. "Her research is absolutely cutting edge and she provides a critical link between Whitman students and the international research community."*

alive and managed to film the cell growing. "It was great but really hard to do. It's so much easier in the lab when you have the right equipment."

Wallace and Withers' teamwork includes an ongoing research project at OHSU, for which Wallace is the principal investigator. The focus of this project is to develop methods that can detect effects of low level exposure to neurotoxins in the developing central nervous system. With that project and the one NSF is funding at Whitman, "I don't really have time to do any additional research." That is why, she added, she and Wallace enjoy the shared teaching position. It gives them half

of their time to do research and half to teach. "Of course, we're not here half time; we're here all the time, so it works out well for the students, too."

As her research, funded by the CAREER grant, goes forward, it creates more opportunities for students to work in her lab and gives her the flexibility to bring more of her research into the classroom, said Withers. Eventually she sees the opportunity for students to have hands-on experience manipulating living cells in all of her courses. The life sciences and the work she and Wallace do are changing rapidly. "We need to train our students to work across the borders

of traditional scientific disciplines. Integrative, interdisciplinary thinking is what will be required to solve the next generation of scientific problems."

Whitman students, she said, are up to the challenge. "They are fantastic, positive, and insightful. Every student in my neurobiology class somewhere along the line has asked a question that I thought was profound or insightful — they dove to the crux of the issue. It's exciting to work with students who really get it and are going to do something with it. I'm very glad to be here."

— Lenel Parish

recently won a National Science Foundation CAREER award to help her develop new teaching approaches while actively maintaining her research, said her work will benefit greatly from the Keck Foundation's grant. Keck funds will allow her to put together four student research stations where students will have the opportunity to work with living cells.



*Associate Professor of Biology Dan Vernon, center, and seniors Kerry Cutler and Dan Cushing, pose with Arabidopsis plants, which are used in gene research.*



Author Maya Angelou shared songs, poetry, and personal stories in a presentation at Whitman College in February.

## Maya Angelou captivates audience at Whitman

Multi-talented Maya Angelou — poet, educator, best-selling author, actress, and civil-rights activist — captivated a full house at Cordiner Hall February 25.

Introduced by sophomore Cathryn Posey, Angelou held the audience's undivided attention with a mix of songs, poetry, and personal stories. "Each one of you has the chance to compose not only your life," she said, "but the climate in which you live." In her own life, she explained, poetry helped "compose for me the climate in which I could heal."

Angelou is the author of numerous books, including *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which was

nominated for the National Book Award, and her poetry collection, *Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Diiie*, which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. In the 1960s, at the request of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she served as a coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

In January 1993, at the request of President Bill Clinton, she became only the second poet to write and recite original work at a presidential inauguration.

She is Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

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## *Impressions of the historical Jesus*

Long-time Whitman College Professor of Religion Roy W. Hoover has edited a new volume titled *Profiles of Jesus* (Polebridge Press, 2002). Hoover, who is Weyerhaeuser Professor of Biblical Literature Emeritus, also is the author of a chapter in the book titled "The Jesus of History: A Vision of the Good Life."

### NEW BOOKS

He is a contributing author to two other new books, *The Once & Future Faith* (Polebridge Press, 2001), and *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment?* (InterVarsity Press, 2000), edited by Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli. Professor Hoover, who now lives and conducts his research in Irvine, California, also has written several other reports and essays in recent years.

A member of the Whitman faculty from 1967 until his retirement in 1999, he received a Whitman College Award for Faculty Achievement in 1992.

Professor Hoover's spouse, Elizabeth Hoover, served Whitman College for many years as a senior admission officer.

The idea came to Rogers Miles a year ago as he graded final exams. In all likelihood, the concept had been germinating for a decade as Miles, an adjunct assistant professor of religion, led his share of first-year students through "Antiquity & Modernity," the bedrock class for Whitman's Core program.

"There have been so many times when first-year parents, visiting campus, would tell me how much their son or daughter was enjoying Whitman as well as the Core class," Miles says. "In many cases, parents were envious, saying they wished they could take the class too."

That wish came true this past fall for first-year parents wanting to follow along as their offspring tackled the Core class and the ancient texts of Homer, Sappho, Aeschylus, and Plato. Parents were invited during fall semester orientation to enroll in Parents Core, a web-based discussion group. Interested parents were given access to a "blackboard site" on the Whitman web page, where Miles posted the same reading assignments, handouts, and daily discussion questions he was using in his on-campus Core class. An email forum allowed parents to discuss issues related to the class readings.

More than 60 parents registered for the blackboard site, and nearly half of those parents accessed the site anywhere from 95 to 1,492 times. "My impression, from talking to parents and looking at the statistics, is that the program was more successful than I could have hoped," Miles says. "I'm certainly going to sponsor Parents Core again next fall. You never do a course just once. That's no way to tell if it really works or not."

The class was successful, in part, because the content was meaningful to parents, Miles says. "It always made perfect sense to me when parents told me they wished they could take the Core class. As someone in middle age who reread these texts in preparing to teach the class,

I understood their interest. To me, these great works of literature now resonate in ways that are far more meaningful than when I was younger. I can remember as an 18-year-old reading Augustine's *Confessions* and thinking, 'Come on, get on with the story. No more prayers and meditations — just get on with the story.'

"Now, I savor the prayers and meditations that begin each book of the *Confessions*. I see all sorts of points that eluded me when I was younger. Perception among 18-year-olds is so much different, in large part because they have little sense of their own mortality. They understand love, and we certainly emphasize love in Core, but for them death remains just a theoretical entity."

In other, more practical ways, Miles says, the Parents Core class helped first-year parents make active connections with the College, with

each other, and with their own children. "Discussions in the email forum might have started with parents talking about one of the texts, but there were also times when parents were simply comparing notes on how their children were coping with their first year in college."

One of the highlights of the inaugural Parents Core program was an on-campus gathering during Parents Weekend in late October. "There must have been 25 to 30 parents there," Miles says. He and two other Core faculty members — Bernard Fenik, the visiting Johnston Professor of Classics, and Margo Scribner, a lecturer in the English and General Studies programs — led the parents in a discussion of one of the class texts, the Book of Job. "It was a great discussion," Miles says. "There was no shortage of parents willing to voice their opinions and questions."

When he launched his Parents Core class, Miles planned to discontinue his first experiment in "distance learning" after Parents Weekend. "But then I heard from a number of parents who asked if I could please keep it going at least through the end of the semester. That's what we did."

Stuart Lichtman, a first-year parent from Santa Barbara, California, is one of the parents who appreciated Whitman's first Parents Core class, calling it a "remarkable experience." "I had lots of neat discussions with my son Per about the books and issues covered in the class," Lichtman adds. "I grew; I bonded on another level with my son; I met some other, very interesting parents, and I gained a real sense of accomplishment."

— David Holden

## *Parents tackle first-year Core in discussions online*



*Professor Rogers Miles has offered Whitman parents a chance to delve into the classics along with his first-year Core class. At left, Miles and students Huyen Pham, Emily Mendell, Marni Hamack, and Aaron Mandel discuss a reading assignment.*