

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

# CALS Connection

VOLUME 19 SPRING 2013

Building Better Peppers

Aquaponics Working  
to Sustain the World

**CALS Student  
Making Strides In  
Jaguar Conservation**

**UF** UNIVERSITY of  
FLORIDA  
IFAS

## LETTER FROM THE DEAN



### Success Comes in Many Forms

Students in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences have many opportunities to enhance their education with organized activities both inside and outside the classroom. Hands-on experiences make our students competitive for a variety of professions or continued studies after graduation.

Stories in this issue of *CALS Connection* focus on student success – whether that be reaching out to a new audience of students through Coursera and distance education or a particularly successful graduate student who has served his home country while at the same time researching jaguars, one of the keystone species in wildlife conservation. Our students participate in innovative classes that give them the kinds of hands-on

experiences that will one day be valuable on a graduate application or resume and events such as AgFacts Day help them to gain an understanding of related industries.

I hope you will enjoy learning about just a few of the opportunities that make CALS uniquely focused on helping our students in this issue of *CALS Connection*. If you know students who would like to become a part of CALS, please direct them to [www.cals.ufl.edu](http://www.cals.ufl.edu) for more information.

**Go Gators!**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Teri Balsler". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Teri Balsler, CALS Dean

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# Building Better Peppers

BY NICOLUS HARTLEY

A University of Florida horticultural sciences professor is teaching undergraduate students how to use conventional genetic breeding techniques to build better peppers.

The project “Building Better Peppers,” originating in the fall 2010 semester, teaches students the intricacies of plant breeding and crop improvement, said horticultural sciences professor and course instructor Bala Rathinasabapathi, Ph.D. He has been able to expand the project’s efforts due to funding from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

“This project is interesting to students, and the research helps students to lead up to a new product,” Rathinasabapathi said.

One of the motivations of this project is for students to gain real-life experience in working with plant breeding, he said. After having practiced conducting research and analyzing the results from the pepper plants, students begin creating their own product.

“The BBP project teaches students to develop a product and explore the value of crossing plant genetics, while also expanding research on the pepper plant,” Rathinasabapathi said.

Rathinasabapathi teaches students a research technique he created, which utilizes a scatter plot graph that consists of a visual display of each plant’s uniqueness. This graph allows students the ability to view which plants are different than others, just by looking at the graph.

“The BBP project has its share of complications; I have come across the problem of training students on research techniques,” he said. “It takes time to master research techniques, and this becomes a challenge with students’ small amount of time they have during a semester.”

Attempting to solve this dilemma, Rathinasabapathi created a system allowing teams of undergraduate students to continue working on the project semester after semester. This method enables

students to continue enhancing the project while learning and expanding on the work of others, he said.

“The idea is like a relay race,” Rathinasabapathi said. “Every semester students pass on the baton of new knowledge gained from the project, allowing other students to expand on that material.”

During the semester, students will spend time each week growing the plants in the greenhouse and in the field.

Undergraduate student Sean Rider, who is involved in the BBP project, said, “I enjoy having the hands-on experience. I learn things better because I get to put my hands on it.”

Each semester students who are involved in the BBP project are encouraged to utilize their creativity and critical thinking skills, Rathinasabapathi said.

“Students involved in the BBP project are learning the importance of creativity in agriculture,” he said. □

**“The BBP project teaches students to develop a product and explore the value of crossing plant genetics...”**



Professor Bala Rathinasabapathi teaches students conventional breeding techniques to “build better peppers” with visiting professor from the University of Roraima, Brazil, Lucianne Braga Oliveira Vilarinho, Ph.D. (Photos by Marisol Amador)

# UF and Coursera Changing the Future of Education

BY GRETCHEN WULFF

Online courses from top universities that are free for anyone to take; universities educating not only thousands of students, but millions; this is what the founders of the social entrepreneurship company Coursera hope for the future and UF is helping to make that happen.

Coursera has partnered with 62 universities worldwide, UF being the only one in Florida, to bring education to anyone who can login.

This spring UF offered its first free massive open online courses (MOOCs) through Coursera. Four of the five courses offered from UF were taught by CALS faculty.

"Coursera was looking for a big school in the Southeast and they really had nothing in the agricultural and life sciences area," said CALS associate dean Al Wysocki, Ph.D. "It was a good blend."

Now anyone in the world can get a feel for what it means to be a Gator and by the looks of initial enrollment there is quite an appetite for it, said Wysocki. More than 45,000 students enrolled in the Fundamentals of Human Nutrition course. That is almost UF's total on-campus enrollment, or enough people to fill more than half of the seats in Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.

"As soon as the word got out," said Wysocki, "there were a lot of people saying 'can we be a part of this' around campus."

Coursera courses are not like the usual online course. Instructors worked with the Center for Instructional Training and Technology to design their courses specifically for Coursera. Weekly materials include short 10 to 15 minute lectures, activities like outside readings, assessments and class discussions, said Wysocki.

"It really took us out of our comfort zone as a university," said Wysocki. "We can learn something from this."



(Photo from Thinkstock.com)

Wendall Porter, Ph.D., in the department of agricultural and biological engineering teaches the Global Sustainable Energy course that enrolled more than 13,000 students this spring from all over the world.

Porter also worked with CITT when designing his Coursera course and said it was different than designing any other online course. Lecture videos are only 10 to 20 minutes long.

"The hardest part was getting used to speaking without an audience, but it is still a conversation with your students," said Porter.

The global aspect of his Coursera course is unmatched in any of his on campus courses. Students from all over the world were amazed that diesel fuel was more expensive than gasoline in the U.S. and reflected on the price of diesel fuel and why the price was so different in their own countries, said Porter.

Instructors were encouraged to engage with students once the class got started, said Porter.

"One of the other instructors said don't be so worried about correcting someone's mistake or question right off the bat," said Porter. "Wait a little bit, the students will get on board and correct it themselves. It

really is a self-teaching course"

The neatest part, said Porter, was when one student said we've got all these people from all over the world, why are we just talking about it, why don't we get together in these different regions and get moving on some of these topics.

The back and forth between students is a unique part of these MOOCs, said Porter. Students from all over the world get the chance to talk and interact with one another.

There has been talk about how students can get credit for these courses, said Wysocki. One option might be to pay for an exam that would certify completion of the course, but Coursera still does not want to charge for the actual class.

"UF is going to continue to look at how we most effectively engage in distance education, what does that mean for our on-campus experience and how do we leverage the two?" said Wysocki.

UF plans to continue its partnership with Coursera. More courses are in the works for the future, said Wysocki.

"I think the entire face of education at the higher levels and even all levels will change faster than what we can keep track of in the next 10 years," said Porter. □

# Project Landscape

BY JOY L. BURNHAM



Students designed and implemented a "Florida Friendly Landscape" for the new IFAS Plant Diagnostics Center. (Photos by Tyler Jones)

The University of Florida's new Plant Diagnostic Center, which opened in January 2013, received a landscape facelift with the help of undergraduate students.

Plant Pathology Disease Clinic director Carrie Harmon said the Plant Diagnostic Center, made up of the Plant Disease Clinic and the Rapid Turf Diagnostic Service, will continue its research on pathogens that make plants sick. The Plant Disease Clinic takes samples from the United States and anywhere in the Western Hemisphere.

"Our clients can be anyone from a homeowner with a sick rosebush, to a grower with 14 acres of pumpkins, to a regulatory lab in the Dominican Republic," Harmon said. "Our clientele represents anybody who deals with plants."

The residential landscape design class, LDE 3410C, designed the landscape outside the new building that was then installed by the landscape and turf grass management class, ORH 4236.

"Doing the landscape for the clinic was awesome," said Mary Reeg, a senior student in the residential landscape design class. "It was exciting designing a landscape that I would be able to see implemented. It was great to be able to make a creative and aesthetically pleasing design that also fulfilled needs and solved problems posed by the site."

Gail Hansen de Chapman, Ph.D., is the instructor for the residential landscape design class and faculty adviser for the Florida Friendly Landscape campaign, which focuses on putting plants in the right place, protecting water resources and using specific plants. She said she is excited about the opportunity the Plant Diagnostic Center represents for students.

"The class was excited to design a landscape that would actually be installed," Hansen said. "They can put it in their portfolio, and it's a really nice picture to be able to show a prospective employer. This was too good of a learning opportunity to not involve the students."

Reeg said choosing plants and designing the landscape has taught her a lot about plant growth and other horticultural practices, which will eventually help in her career.

"This was definitely a great experience to prepare me for a career in public gardens or landscape design," said Reeg. "Each project that I complete teaches me new skills and gives me insight into how to design functional and pleasant landscapes."

The Plant Disease Clinic is being moved from its current location on Mowry Road into the new Plant Diagnostic Center behind Fifield Hall.

"The current Plant Disease Clinic is



almost 100 years old, and it used to be part of a farm house when this side of campus was farmland," Harmon said. "I joke that I get a new diagnostic lab every 100 years."

The Plant Diagnostic Center also houses the Doctor of Plant Medicine Student Workroom and the Diagnostic Training Facility, where students are trained in laboratory techniques in Plant Pathology and other disciplines. □

**"This was definitely a great experience to prepare me for a career in public gardens or landscape design."**

# CALS Student Making Strides In Jaguar Conservation

BY GRETCHEN WULFF

Many students work part- or full-time jobs through college, but not many serve as a senator in a foreign country while dealing with the commute. For native Belizean and Ph.D. student Omar Figueroa it is a small price to pay for the conservation efforts of Central America.

Figueroa grew up in western Belize in the small town of San Ignacio. Belize is a small Latin American country recognized for its natural beauty. The relatively low human population density has allowed for maintaining the large tracks of contiguous forests. At a young age Figueroa had the opportunity to travel through the entire country. It was then that he truly gained an appreciation for the wealth and diversity Belize had to offer, said Figueroa.

"I think it is extremely important that in the future my kids, and other Belizean kids, are able to grow up in a Belize that still offers that wealth of natural beauty which generations before me enjoyed," said Figueroa. "I want to play a role in ensuring this."

The highest level of education he could receive in his town was high school, said Figueroa. He had to travel almost 70 miles to Belize City to continue his

education at a junior college, the highest level of education in the country at the time.

Figueroa had the opportunity to go to the University of North Florida for his bachelor's degree. After, he returned to Belize and began working in avian research as the National Coordinator for the Birds Without Borders–Aves Sin Fronteras Project, an international research, education and conservation project focusing on neotropical migratory birds.

A few years later Figueroa applied for and was awarded a Fulbright Ecology Initiative Fellowship. The University of Florida had always been on his mind as a school that has produced many of the conservation leaders in the Americas.

"The Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation really has a reputation in the region as being one of the standout universities in the U.S. as it relates to international programs specifically," said Figueroa.

Figueroa was deciding between three schools when he met Kenneth Meyer, Ph.D., from the wildlife ecology and conservation department at UF. He was very impressed with his research on the swallow-tailed kite and its migratory

movements down into Belize and Central and South America, said Figueroa. This was a particular area of interest for Figueroa.

"It all came together when I met Dr. Ken Meyer in Belize; he really put it together for me," said Figueroa. "Ken is one of the reasons why UF is such a special place."

Figueroa completed his master's degree at UF studying the Jabiru Stork, one of the largest flying birds in the Americas. His thesis project is the first and only Global Positioning System study on this regionally imperiled species, said Figueroa.

Immediately after receiving his master's degree, Figueroa was awarded a Dexter Fellowship as well as other international research grants and pursued his Ph.D. at UF researching the jaguar, one of the greatest conservation icons for Latin America, said Figueroa.

Jaguars are one of the keystone species in conservation, said Figueroa, and understanding their habitat requirements and conservation needs can help us denote priority areas for conservation.

Figueroa's research project involved trapping jaguars and deploying 10 GPS satellite collars to track their movements



An adult male jaguar assumes a defensive stand prior to being chemically immobilized. (Photos courtesy of Omar Figueroa)



Omar Figueroa prepares the required drug dose to chemically immobilize a jaguar.



Omar Figueroa observes/monitors an immobilized jaguar.

and it all almost fell apart when the entire initial deployment of 8 collars unexpectedly failed. He was able to get back on his feet with help from his adviser, Susan Jacobson, Ph.D.

"[Figueroa] was able to overcome many challenges in the field," said Jacobson. "He has the composure and perseverance to deal with all kinds of adversity."

At the same time Figueroa was conducting fieldwork and pursuing a Ph.D. he was nominated by the prime minister of Belize to serve as a member of the Senate.

"Trying to balance the Senate and field research can get a little bit tricky," said Figueroa. "Especially if you work with a professor who really doesn't understand the challenges you're up against and doesn't give you that little bit of room to pursue what you believe in. In this

regard, I feel very fortunate to have been supervised and mentored by Susan Jacobson."

While Figueroa faced many challenges there were equally as many rewards. Directly related to research in the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation at UF was the identification of an area in Belize that was critically important for jaguars. He fought to secure the area that is now a nationally protected area in Belize called the Laboring Creek Jaguar Corridor Wildlife Sanctuary and updated Belize wildlife policy.

"Belize, like many countries in Latin America, is under a lot of developmental pressure," said Figueroa. "If we are to maintain this wealth of natural beauty it is imperative to not only update laws and policies, but we need in-country experts to lead and guide the process."

"One of the tremendous assets [UF] has are people like Dr. Jacobson serving as mentors and as professors," said Figueroa. "If it wasn't for her mentorship, guidance and really just her friendship and support I wouldn't be here today."

Figueroa received the Rabinowitz-Kaplan prize for the Next Generation in Wild Cat Conservation for his contribution to jaguar conservation in Belize. He is the only recipient from the Americas to receive this globally competitive conservation award.

"I would not be here if it wasn't for Dr. Jacobson, and I cannot express my gratitude and appreciation for her enough and by extension the department and university, said Figueroa." □

## Celebrating AgFacts Day

BY HOLLY FLEMING

Free chocolate milk? Students, faculty and staff were greeted with agricultural treats in celebration of the third annual AgFacts Day this spring.

AgFacts Day, originally called Thank a Farmer Thursday, is an agricultural awareness day that was created three years ago by graduate students in animal sciences.

This year AgFacts Day fell on March 19 in conjunction with National Agriculture Day. The goal of AgFacts Day is to provide information about agriculture and related sciences to students, faculty and staff. Individuals received information in the form of quick verbal factoids and hand fliers. Several individuals engaged in longer conversations, getting their questions about food answered by CALS students.

"When you have a passion for agriculture it's something you want to share with others, and this day is the perfect opportunity to allow for that," said Lauren Mayo, an animal sciences senior who coordinated the event.

Mayo was an active leader in AgFacts Day since its inception. She helped at each of the three booths set up on campus at the J. Wayne Reitz Union

Colonnade, Turlington Plaza and Plaza of the Americas.

Nearly 50 student volunteers staffed the booths and shared information with anyone who would listen. Volunteers were distinctly dressed in bright orange and blue T-shirts with numerous agricultural facts listed across the back. The front read "Get the wool out of your ears."

Volunteers came from many CALS student organizations, including Block and Bridle, Sigma Alpha, Gator Collegiate CattleWomen, Dairy Science Club, Alpha Zeta and Collegiate FFA. This is the most student organizations that have ever volunteered to support AgFacts Day.

"AgFacts Day is really helpful and informative to those who don't know a lot about agriculture and where food comes from," said Harrison Cribbs, former Block and Bridle president. "It's really cool to see the light come on in some people's minds about agriculture and how it works."

Each of the booths had informational fliers and samples of orange juice, milk, peanuts and beef jerky for people to take. The products that were handed out were donated by Florida producers, said Mayo. The food and drink samples were meant

to draw attention and interest to the booths. Individuals were asked to sign a thank you card prior to receiving their samples. Thank you cards were delivered to agricultural producers in Florida after the event. At the end of the day there were 500 signatures on the cards and 2,000 fliers had been distributed.

A major donor was Dale McClellan, a Florida dairy farmer. He donated all of the milk and the orange juice samples. Other supporters of AgFacts Day included Florida Dairy Farmers, Florida Beef Council, Fresh From Florida and Cattle Empire, said Mayo.

"The biggest thing is to get consumers thinking, really thinking about the food production process," said Mayo.

Many people don't stop to think about how food gets to their plate, especially when thinking about how much labor it takes to get a product from the field to the store. Through AgFacts Day people learned facts such as it takes 105 days to grow a single head of broccoli, said Mayo.

"Agriculture and food security is a big deal, and it's important to educate the general public about it," Mayo said. □

# Aquaponics Working to Sustain the World

BY TORY BOYD

Plant science freshman Victor Guerra works to make sustainable agriculture a worldwide practice, starting in his own backyard.

Guerra has his own aquaponics system, a combination of aquaculture and hydroponics, where plants are grown in water instead of soil. It is a form of sustainable agriculture practice giving higher yields with less input and maintenance.

The aquaponics system is at his home in Tampa. He travels there several times a month to maintain the system.

Among many other plants, Guerra grows mint plants in the system. He harvests the mint leaves and makes tea from them.

"I harvest at my house in Tampa, then I bring a sack of the harvested material in my dorm and have it drying until I make the tea," he said. "It leaves a good smell too!"

Guerra first got interested in aquaponics after visiting his father's family in Nicaragua. His father works in aquaponics, but Guerra took it to the next level, he said. Since it is not a highly practiced means of crop production, Guerra is learning a lot as he goes along.

Guerra wants to work in rural areas that need more sustainable agriculture practices. His goal is to teach communities in need how to provide food for themselves using an aquaponic system. His specific areas of interest are Central America and the Middle East, he said.

These aquaponic systems not only can supply food, but can also draw interest and create more tourism for these countries, he said. Whether it is food production or attracting tourists, sharing



Victor Guerra is one of the five plant science students enrolled in the inaugural class of the Innovation Academy. (Photo by Tyler Jones)

the knowledge is Guerra's goal.

"It makes me want to show people that they can do things for themselves and don't have to depend on a supermarket," said Guerra. "That they can grow their own food. It's an art that's being lost. One of the simplest human traits is growing food, but people have lost that and I think that's important. That's the driving force that's behind it for me."

Guerra said that he wants to fine tune the sustainable agriculture practice and bring it to international aid organizations so that they can spread the knowledge to those in need.

After pouring a glass of the iced mint tea he made earlier that day, Guerra continued on about his plans after school

this summer.

"It looks like in fall, at the end of my first year, I'll be going to Nicaragua to oversee a big aquaponics production that's going on over there at an ecotourism location," Guerra said. "I'll be making sure that any problems they're having will be addressed."

Guerra is a student in the Innovation Academy, a new program where students only attend spring and summer session, using fall as their time off. He enjoys the schedule because it allows him to take long trips to study aquaponics during the fall semester, he said. Guerra is majoring in plant science with a specialization in sustainable food production. □

**"I harvest at my house in Tampa, then I bring a sack of the harvested material in my dorm and have it drying until I make the tea."**

# Students Get Their Feet Wet Learning Fisheries Practices

BY LAURA GORHAM

UF students are getting their feet wet at Lake Alice while they learn the importance of sampling fish and different marine habitats.

Introduction to Fishery Science, FAS 4305C, provides students with an overview of different field and laboratory techniques of surveying fish populations while also exposing students to the practical applications of working in the fisheries field.

Course supervisors Dan Canfield, Ph.D., and Charles Cichra, Ph.D., provide an environment where students learn the classroom and hands-on techniques of working in the field. Students meet bi-weekly at Lake Alice to practice the skills learned in lecture.

"These students learn very quickly how working in the field is different," Canfield said. "It teaches students how to think critically and how to mesh the information they learned in the classroom into practical field work."

Canfield has been teaching the class since the early 1980s. Through the years, he has received feedback from class

alumni on how to add more information and skills to the class. Class information structured on the alumni feedback gives students a feel for what techniques, issues and skills they will actually need and see in the field, Canfield said.

Teaching assistant Amanda Croteau said that learning the basic skills will make them more efficient as professionals in the future.

"Each week, we have different volunteers to back up the truck and launch the boat into the lake," she said.

Every week students will learn the hands-on skills that they will use in the field as professionals. Each field laboratory is dedicated to teaching skills, such as water analysis and different fish sampling procedures.

"The students learn different techniques to show where and how many fish are seen in different types of habitats," Cichra said.

Throughout the semester, the students learned the processes of electrofishing, gillnetting and seining.

Electrofishing uses electricity to stun the fish, which then float to the top of the water to be caught by a net.

Gillnetting is a catching process that uses a mesh net that reaches from the top to the bottom of the lake and catches the fish as they swim through it. Seining is a method of fishing that uses a seine, a fishing net that hangs vertically in the water with its bottom edge held down by weights and its top edge buoyed by floats, to close and capture fish.

With all of these methods the fish are then placed into a live

well and measured for length, weight and type and released back into the lake.

In addition to learning sampling procedures, students learn procedures that measure nutrients and how the nutrient quality of the water affects the fish population.

Senior marine sciences major, Anna-beth Peterson, said that she learned the science in the classroom, but performing and practicing the techniques on the lake add a different dimension to her learning experience.

"I love how we are out on the water practicing these techniques, not just in the classroom," Peterson said. "It is really hands on."

Canfield described that practical application of the material they cover in the field labs is coupled with a scientific paper to produce a well-rounded class experience. Students use the data they have collected throughout the semester to test their own hypotheses in a scientific research paper, Canfield said.

Students learn the three critical steps in scientific research.

"We teach them how to analyze large amounts of data, write a research report and give an oral presentation," teaching assistant and former class member Chris Anderson said. "The process [of scientific reasoning] that I learned in this class prepared me for developing my thesis."

Sean Deeb, a marine sciences senior, was interested in adding data to more than 20 years of research.

"What I find interesting is that I am collecting and analyzing data and helping out with maintaining knowledge about Lake Alice," Deeb said. "Future students will continue to use my data for years to come and, because of it, will have a better understanding of how healthy of an environment Lake Alice is."

For more information about the course, visit <http://sfrc.ufl.edu/courses/FAS6932>. □



Students use the techniques learned in class to collect samples from Lake Alice adding to more than 20 years of research.

(Photos by Laura Gorham)

# 2012-2013 Scholarship



## Jack L. Fry Award for Teaching Excellence by a Graduate Student

**KELLY MONAGHAN** is

a Ph.D. student in the interdisciplinary ecology program in the School of Natural Resources and Environment. Monaghan earned B.S. and M.S. degrees in family, youth and community sciences from UF in 2009 and 2010, respectively. In the fall of 2012 Monaghan was the instructor for Community Food Systems, an undergraduate course she designed and developed content for with help from FYCS Associate Professor Mickie Swisher. Monaghan says in her teaching philosophy, "It is my goal to create meaningful learning opportunities for students that will help them succeed." Swisher summarized Monaghan's passion for teaching by saying, "Of all the graduate students with whom I have worked over the years, Ms. Monaghan has been more keenly interested in teaching than any other."



## Graduate Teacher/ Adviser of the Year

**NICOLE L. P. STEDMAN** is an associate professor in the agricultural

education and communication department and the director of the e-Learning Institute. A UF graduate, she received her B.S. in human resource development and her M.S. and Ph.D. in agricultural education and communication before beginning her teaching career at Texas A&M University. Stedman returned to UF in 2007 and teaches courses in leadership development. Her teaching philosophy is to provide students with opportunities to experiment with ideas, concepts, and personal beliefs while

nurturing their ability and confidence to ask difficult questions, evaluate arguments and examine their own judgments. A graduate student working under her direction commented, "Dr. Stedman goes above and beyond the requirements of an adviser by providing helpful insight and challenging her students to take ownership over their education."



## Undergraduate Adviser of the Year

**JACQUELINE K. WHITE** is the coordinator of academic support services at

the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences' Indian River Research and Education Center in Fort Pierce. As coordinator of academic support services, White provides guidance to undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in degree-seeking programs at the IRREC or in online programs. As an adviser, White sees herself as an ambassador for the Gator Nation, striving to make all students feel like they are part of UF, even if they are not studying in Gainesville. "All students immediately recognize that Jackie is the 'go-to' person when seeking information on degree programs offered at the IRREC, current course or prerequisite requirements, and enrollment procedures into UF/IFAS," said IRREC Center Director Peter Stoffella.



## Undergraduate Adviser of the Year

**WENDELL A. PORTER** is a lecturer in the agricultural and biological

engineering department and serves as undergraduate coordinator for the agricultural operations management major. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from the University of Central Florida and North Carolina State University, respectively,

before embarking on a career in the aerospace industry. Porter earned his Ph.D. at UF in 2003 and joined the ABE faculty soon thereafter. He has reshaped the AOM program by tightening the core curriculum, organizing electives in career path concentrations, developing relationships with community colleges and establishing distance education courses. Porter maintains an open-door policy and attends all of his students' graduations whether he is in the ceremony or not. His ready wit and willingness to listen and offer honest advice make him a favorite among students and earned him the nickname "Mr. AOM."



## Undergraduate Teacher of the Year

**H. MIKAEL SANDBERG** has a passion for teaching. As a lecturer with

a 100 percent teaching appointment in the food and resource economics department, he prepares future business leaders, budding economists and global citizens enrolled in his classes by relating course material to real-world problems, politics and economic phenomena. Sandberg transforms his classroom into a forum for active learning, devoid of PowerPoints and filled with enthusiastic exchanges. Students speak highly of Sandberg's ability to communicate the principles of economics in ways that have a lasting impact. As one student wrote, "To many students, the pivotal point of a career is finding a passion through their sector of education. Dr. Sandberg instills that passion for agricultural economics on a daily basis."

# and Leadership Awards



## Undergraduate Teacher of the Year

**MONIKA K. OLI** is a course designer and lecturer in the microbiology and cell science depart-

ment whose goal is to bring the world into the classroom by linking classroom exercises with real-world problems. Oli's courses give students a contemporary understanding of their field and confidence in their ability to conduct scientific inquiry in a real-world laboratory. Her dedication to her students; her work to make course material relevant and comprehensible with "problem-based, experiential learning;" and her course improvements receive enthusiastic support from students, TAs, peers and superiors. "She has completely overhauled and modernized these courses to provide state-of-the-art laboratory exercises to our students," wrote Eric Triplett, microbiology and cell science department chair. In addition to this honor, Oli was recognized as 2012-2013 UF Teacher of the Year.



## Alumni and Friends Leadership Award

**LAUREN MAYO**, a senior from River-

view, is majoring in animal sciences with an agricultural communication minor. Mayo has served as a CALS Ambassador, held leadership roles in the Dairy Science Club and Collegiate Farm Bureau, and coordinated the UF AgFacts Day. She is the first UF student to hold a national office in the American Dairy Science Association and subsequently won the ADSA's Outstanding Student Award as its top undergraduate student. Joel Brendemuhl, Ph.D., animal sciences assistant chair, predicts that Mayo will be "a major player in animal agriculture at the national level."



## Larry J. Connor Medal of Excellence Award

**ANSUYA DEOSARAN** graduated this

spring with a degree in food science and human nutrition with a nutritional sciences specialization and a communication studies minor. She was a research assistant in the FSHN department and the College of Medicine's tissue engineering lab as well as a volunteer at the Helping Hands Clinic, the pharmacy department at Shands Hospital and the UF English Language Institute. Dr. Nicholas Simpson, associate professor at the College of Medicine wrote that "Ansuya is both intellectually blessed and highly motivated, a combination which has led to her many successes."



## Jimmy G. Cheek Graduate Student Medal of Excellence Award

**MATTHEW**

**SHIRLEY** earned his Ph.D. this spring in wildlife ecology and conservation. With a bachelor's degree from Yale University in ecology and evolutionary biology, Shirley came to UF in 2005 to work toward a M.S. degree in wildlife ecology and conservation. He began his doctoral work in 2009 under James Austin, Ph.D., and has since amassed a formidable research record, surveying wild crocodile populations in Central and West Africa in a study one UF faculty member describes as "exhaustive and groundbreaking." Of Shirley, associate professor of biology Charles Baer, Ph.D., wrote, "He seems like one of those old school upper-class adventurers, of the sort that built the empire; I would fully expect to find a well-worn volume of Kipling in the side pocket of his backpack."



## E. T. York, Jr. Medal of Excellence Outstanding Junior Award

**SHELBY FRANTZ** is a food science and human nutrition

major from Valrico. She has volunteered at the student-run Equal Access Clinic for indigent care since her freshman year and serves as the clinic's HIV services director and 5k race co-coordinator. "Shelby is one of the most reliable people I know, and if she commits to something she will always come through. Shelby puts in 110 percent to everything she does no matter how big or small the task may be," said one of her Equal Access Clinic co-directors.



## J. Wayne Reitz Medal of Excellence Outstanding Senior Award

A Gainesville native, **GENE RODRICK** gradu-

ated this spring with a degree in food science and human nutrition. While at UF, Rodrick was in both the university-wide and CALS Honors programs, assisted with research at the McKnight Brain Institute and delivered medical care in rural areas of Ghana. Rodrick will attend medical school at the University of South Florida and plans a career in academic medicine. FSHN Professor Gail Kauwell, Ph.D., said, "He is a humble and self-directed young man who has a strong work ethic and who strives for personal excellence in all that he does." □

## Gator Encounter Attracts More Than 550

**C**ALS hosted more than 550 middle and high school students from across the state on April 6 for Gator Encounter. Participants are part of the Advancement Via Individual Determination Program, a college readiness system that is designed to increase school wide learning and

performance. Students attended workshops taught by CALS faculty, staff and students and were engaged in a CALS Ambassador-led pep rally prior to attending the annual University of Florida Orange and Blue Game.

