Report from Professor Chris Palmer on the 2016 Classroom in the Wild

This year’s Classroom in the Wild: Chesapeake Bay was a great success, and featured a diverse group of students including graduate and undergraduate students from a variety of programs (both AU and non-AU), and working professionals from government agencies, National Geographic, and from as far away as Ecuador.

SOC’s Jamey Warner led the program, assisted by SOC’s Vanina Harel. Jamey and Vanina did a superb job.

Both Sandy Cannon-Brown and I spent time with the class in the field and loved every moment of it.

The group experienced extraordinary weather that made for a fantastic experience for each of the 14 students involved. The class spent five days in the Bay region, traveling between their home base at the Wye Island Natural Resources Management Area and a number of locations in the local area. Students visited the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center (CBEC) where they took part in a hands-on presentation from CBEC’s educational staff on birds of prey, and explored the Center’s property, shooting footage along the way.

The group met with the president of Friends of Blackwater (a local organization dedicated to supporting the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge) and spent two days exploring the refuge’s 20,000+ acres of protected habitat that serves as a key stopover for migrating birds and waterfowl along the Atlantic Flyway. Students captured footage of bald eagles nesting in the area and experienced run-ins with countless numbers of reptiles, amphibians, native birds, and migrating waterfowl along the way.

The class finished the week with three days of post-production back on AU’s campus, where students discussed principles of editing, learned about incorporating sound, and produced PSAs, promotional videos for our partners at CBEC and Blackwater NWR, sequences for personal reels, and even a parody on a popular reality television series!

The finished films will be screened at a special Center for Environmental Filmmaking event in the Doyle/Forman Theater in the fall.

The class was visited by two special guests, Ted Duvall (show runner for NatGeo WILD’s popular series, The Incredible Dr. Pol) and Kelly Sweet (producer for National Geographic’s
Natural History Unit) who spent a couple of hours speaking about their careers, networking, and tirelessly answering questions until late in the evening.

I’d like to commend each one of the students for their enthusiasm and success throughout the week: Cosima Amelang, Caroline Hanson, Ashley Holmes, Sam Tinsley, Ken Lang, Wendy Mears, Lesia Olesnyckyj, Raffi Paul, Liz Shumpert, Jen Smith, Olivia Tarantino, Shaina Villalobos, Michael Bollinger, Fatima Viteri Mancero, and Jennifer Lewis. Their commitment to the craft and to fostering a positive learning environment, despite the long days, was inspiring.

In addition to Jamey and Vanina, I want to thank all my SOC colleagues who support Classroom in the Wild, including Jeff Rutenbeck, John Douglass, Jean McGee, Geoff Turner, Jeffrey Madison, John Zollinger, Tia Sumler, Dani Rizzo, Laura Murray, Melanie Werner, Christine Frezek, Melanie Glover, and Tara Flakker. Thank you!