

Holding class in the rain forest

Students and professors researching in the tropical rain forests must race against time. As large portions of the world's rain forests disappear, the plants that might provide treatments for such diseases as cancer and AIDS go with them.

Under the supervision of ethnobotanist Paul Cox, Brigham Young U. students document the plants used by shamans (local healers) and the shamans' views of medicine. Then the students analyze the plants to determine if they can produce pharmaceuticals.

A plant collected in Samoa, used by shamans to treat yellow fever, was discovered to be active against HIV. "We don't know what the toxicity [of the plant] is yet, so it may not make it as a medicine, but at least it's an interesting lead," Cox says.

BYU senior Alexandra Paul receives research credit for trips which last between two weeks and three months in Haiti, where she studies how indigenous people use plants



BYU students research medicines around the world.

to make textiles, preserve food and, most importantly, treat diseases. Paul, like the rest of Cox's students, learned her site's native language before traveling.

"The rain forest is an incredible experience," Paul says. "I come away with the feeling that I'm able to bridge the gap between cultures and transmit information that otherwise might be lost."

Graduate student Will McClatchey, who does his research on the South Pacific island of Rotuman, is concerned about the knowledge that will be lost due to heavy logging in areas such as Fiji.

He says the Rotuman healers, many of whom are college-educated, are careful about preserving the forest.

"We're not dealing with a bunch of dummies," he says. "These guys are really smart." Yet he worries about indifference.

"It is important to document how the people are using [the plants] simply because the younger generations there could care less about using the plants the way adults do," he says. "It's a knowledge that's rapidly disappearing." ■ Jason Rockfeld, *The Red & Black*, U. of Georgia

Kinder, gentler student loans

Students from 105 campuses could save billions of dollars and loads of paperwork next fall through the Federal Direct Student Loan Program. The program was enacted in July as part of President Clinton's deficit-reduction package.

Proponents say the new direct-lending program will eliminate the fees the government pays banks to handle loans and will lower interest rates. Currently, students pay as much as 8 percent of their loans in fees; borrowers at schools testing the program next fall will pay 4 percent. "This will bring college within the financial reach of more families," says Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., chief sponsor and architect of the program.

When financial aid award letters go out, borrowers in the program will notice fee savings and simpler paper-

work, according to Simon.

Instead of having to deal with middlemen, students will deal directly with their schools. They will also be able to repay their loans at a schedule based on their income, which will give more graduates the freedom to take low-paying jobs such as teaching or social work, Simon says.

Of course, not everybody is happy with the Clinton administration's new program.

"Their agenda is not to help students go to school but to increase their control," says Bill Spadea, chairman of the College Republicans.

But proponents say the plan will save about \$4.3 billion of taxpayers' dollars through fiscal 1998. In fiscal year 1993, the federal government issued 6.1 million student loans for \$18 billion, with defaults totaling \$2.5 billion. Simon expects the lowered interest rates to help reduce the staggering number of defaulters. ■ Michael Dizon, *Daily Illini*, U. of Illinois

A new route to AIDS education

Ben Kadis says a bike ride changed his life.

For eight weeks last summer, he and 19 fellow riders pedaled at least 70 miles a day across the country, raising money and educating people about AIDS for Bike-Aid — a student-based organization now in its 10th year.

Along their route from San Francisco to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., Kadis' group often helped out in soup kitchens, AIDS hospices and senior citizens' homes. "It was a bigger shock and educational experience than my experience in the Peace Corps," says Kadis, a graduate student at the U. of Oregon.

Bike-Aid isn't the only group to combine cycling with AIDS education. A group called PEGASUS (Project to End the Grip of AIDS on Students in the United States) uses a 6,200-mile bicycle journey to fight the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. PEGASUS members took off in September, and by the time they complete their ride in April, they will have sponsored interactive programs about AIDS and other sexual issues at 45 campuses, reaching about 30,000 students.

"Our biggest asset is that we're young and we're not doctors in white coats," says Charles Bales, a 1989 graduate of Duke U., who co-founded the group with five recent graduates. "We're receptive to [students]; they're our peers."



Each year, Bike-Aid cyclists pedal a 3,600-mile-long route from coast to coast.

For more information on PEGASUS, an independent project of HEALTH WATCH, write: 40 Edgewood Lane, Bronxville, NY 10708; or call: (800) 759-8255, PIN 2370103#.

Bike-Aid '94 takes off from five locations this summer. For more information on Bike-Aid, sponsored by the Overseas Development Network, write: 333 Valencia Street, Ste. 330, San Francisco, CA 94103; or call: (415) 431-4480; or fax: (415) 431-5953. ■ Anne Bergman, *Daily Trojan*, U. of Southern California

More Short Takes

THAT'S A FANTASTIC OMELET

AMES, IOWA — A student dispute at Iowa State U. got a little out of hand when junior Thomas Scannel was charged with trying to poison one of his roommates.

Scannel lived in an apartment with three other ISU students who became suspicious after tasting something odd in one of the roommates' salsa and eggs.

Police aren't sure, but they think a cleaning fluid such as Formula 409 was sprayed on the food. Analysis of the food is pending, and if the concentration of the compounds is found to be enough to cause serious injury or death, further charges may be filed.

shorter takes and updates:

NEAT-O TORPEDO: The stockpile of weapons U. of Texas freshman David Larsen was charged with storing in his dorm room: a semiautomatic rifle and 240 rounds of ammunition. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported Larsen told police he thought the weapons "were neat."

TASTY: Smoked locusts, chocolate chirpies and fried tomato worms, which made up the menu of the First Annual Wyoming Insect Cook-Off. Sponsored by U. of Wyoming entomology professor Jim Wangberg, the shindig was held along with a lecture on the nutritional benefits of eating insects.

FIRED: Professor of leisure studies George R. Harker, from his cushy job at Western Illinois U. Harker, who taught "Concepts of Leisure," was fired for allegedly passing on faculty meetings and not giving his students exams.

USED: Schoolgirls' underpants which police in Chiba, Japan, say three men were selling through vending machines for \$30. We reported vending machines which sold art and beer [*U. Magazine*, November 1993] and, at the time, those were the weirdest things available.

FAKE: Nearly \$17,000 in airline tickets 50-year-old Owen Weston allegedly sold international Syracuse U. students. The students, who planned to travel home to India for winter break, paid \$1,195 for the tickets, but when they tried to pick them up, they were told the reservations had been canceled.

NOMINATED: U. of Houston doctoral student Fabian Vaksman, by himself, for the Pulitzer Prize. Vaksman, a researcher, penned the poem "RRacist," in which a student researcher murders state university professors [*U. Magazine*, December 1993]. He hopes to be recognized with a Pulitzer for a series of newspaper opinion columns he wrote.

Briefs compiled from the U. Network and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.