

iMedia graduate students put skills to the test around the world

Caitlin O'Donnell
News Editor

Every January, Interactive Media graduate students spend the month working on a project for the public good, typically with a nonprofit organization, by collecting audio and video content. This year, students traveled to Costa Rica or Panama in four teams to create multimedia products for their clients.

Club de Ciegos de Colón

For the team working with the Club de Ciegos de Colón, or Colón Blind Club, located in Panama, their final website must reach a broad audience. Rather than creating a single website, the group created sites not only in Spanish and English, but also separate websites in each language accessible to the visually impaired.

"This is an organization where people who are blind can go," said Ashley Pearson, project leader. "They get kicked out of their families because they can't be taken care of. They go here to be a part of something."

Currently, 12 residents live in the club year round. There, they learn how to cook, clean and take education courses. A computer room includes desktops with voice recognition software and laptops with brail for children, allowing the blind to access a computer in the same way a seeing person can.

The websites being built by the team involve software that literally reads the page to users or instructs them where to click for an audio or video clip.

"(This) center was a little oasis in this rundown town," Pearson said. "The city is so impoverished and disheartening, but the club is clean, bright and airy."

During the course of their stay, the team met every individual living at the club and spent hours each day interviewing those involved in the club, including its president.

Pearson said she anticipated

the trip would be emotional, but she was touched more than she expected.

"You feel something the entire time you're down there, then there's the breaking point," she said.

For Pearson, this point came as the club president's wife began crying, explaining their thankfulness for the students' work. Soon, the entire group was in tears.

Santa Cruz Recicla

A second team traveled to Costa Rica, similarly focusing on sustainable living, and worked with an organization called Santa Cruz Recicla, which deals with waste management and recycling in the region.

According to project leader Nicole Wyche, the group toured the region, met with representatives and discussed the organization's current needs and future goals in hopes of eventually creating a website for the company.

"The content team was the point people for getting photo and video content and stringing together a narrative on the website that will explain the company," Wyche said.

Throughout the project, Wyche said students learned not only about the workflow of creating a website, but also the difficulties of working with clients and making sure they approve of the final product.

"There was the added hurdle that they're in Costa Rica and not as easy to connect with them," she said. "It was a good learning experience for giving the client what they want, even though it didn't match our initial thoughts."

Faculty adviser Phillip Motley, assistant professor of communications, said topics for the iMedia program are often taught through simulated projects, which lack the human nature of a real client, who can change his or her mind or misunderstand the process.

According to Motley, it is the chance to work for a nonprofit organization that



Despite challenging language barriers, Elon iMedia students found ways to communicate with the indigenous people in Panama.

has the largest impact on students.

"I think this experience often recalibrates the future goals that the students have," he said. "This experience may well change the ways in which they use their skills to better the world through pro bono work or by volunteering their time to those who can truly benefit from their knowledge."

Earth University

After creating content for Earth University in Costa Rica, a second group of iMedia students were invited back to the institution to put their skills to work a second year.

"(Earth University) brings in international students from Costa Rica and abroad to try to teach them about sustainable farming and clean development," said Meghan Gargan, project leader for the team. "They then can teach agriculture processes in their home countries and villages."

The eight students, under the guidance of faculty adviser Sang Um Nam, assistant professor of communications, worked specifically with the Permanent Education Program, or PEP. This branch of the university targets American audiences including students, professors and industry professionals who

visit the university.

Along with a website, the team will create a promotional video about different areas of the program at Elon.

When a group visits the program, their tour is customized to fit their plans and then entirely coordinated by PEP. With the help of coordinators, the iMedia team visited the rainforest, as well as the beach in Costa Rica, and collected multimedia content to highlight the wide range of activities available to visitors.

Fundacion Bendaked

About 50 percent of all indigenous people in Panama live with disabilities, and the Fundacion Bendaked has set out to change lives in their own community, with the recent help of iMedia students.

Hayley Miller, project leader for the group, said the team created a bilingual website highlighting the organization's mission and documenting the stories of disabled members of indigenous communities.

"(The organization has) only been in existence for a year and they had no presence on the Web," Miller said. "The overall design (of our site) is based on a fun, vivid feel since it's tropical and indigenous."

Traveling to remote villages of indigenous people, the team gathered content and interviewed more than 15 families, after gaining approval from the village tribal leaders.

"The Kuna foundation people are trying to identify the needs within different indigenous groups and will work with all communities eventually," Randy Piland, faculty adviser, said.

Miller said the language barrier was often challenging, as the group needed to translate from the native language of Kuna to Spanish and then to English.

"It was intense to work with, especially in post-production and we don't know what communication got lost in between," she said.

After returning to Elon, the team packaged the stories of the disabled into videos and posted them on the website. One video tells the story of Inuiler Lopez, a 30-year-old man living with cerebral palsy and confined, for most of his life, to a wheelchair. Although it is unlikely his condition will improve, his family is striving to ensure he has the resources to live the remainder of his life comfortably.

Despite the sad environment, Miller said it was also inspiring to see families striving to help themselves.

Conservation made simple in fifth POWERless competition

Natalie Allison
Senior Reporter

Elon University will launch its fifth POWERless event Feb. 15, giving on-campus residents the opportunity to reduce their energy consumption through a friendly competition. Each semester, POWERless encourages students to help the university make strides toward one of its long-term goals: becoming carbon neutral by the year 2037.

The goal of each year's POWERless event is to increase awareness of energy conservation among students by having residence halls compete against one another in total energy reduction.

This year's spring POWERless competition will take place from Feb. 15 to March 15.

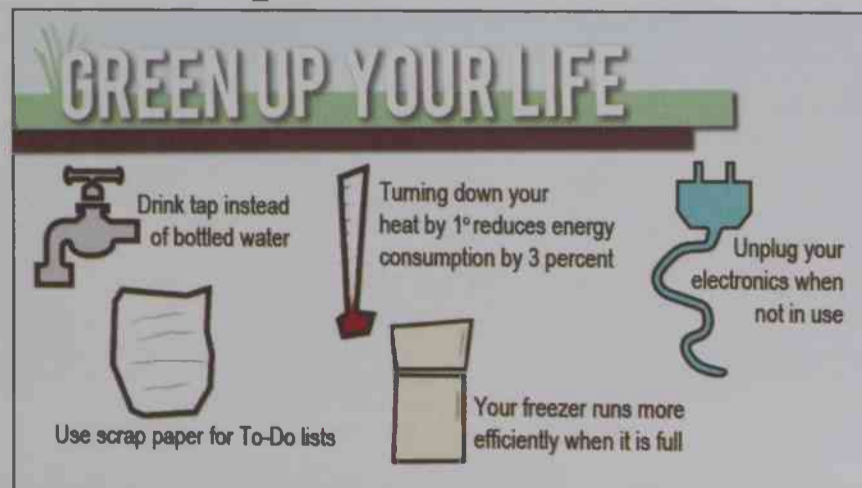
Measured against baseline consumption for each building, the winning residence hall is determined by the building with the greatest percentage of energy reduction during the month-long competition.

Brittany Siciliano, a senior intern in the Office of Sustainability, said this year's campus-wide goal is for 10 percent overall energy reduction.

"We make it really easy for students," Siciliano said. "POWERless is as easy as turning off your lights."

Last spring, the Honors Pavilion led the competition, finishing with a total power reduction of about 37 percent.

Holly Geibel, the current resident



LUKE LOVETT | Graphics Editor

assistant in the Honors Pavilion, also lived in the building last year and said she and the other residents didn't realize how easy it was to save energy.

Geibel said the residents were surprised when they were announced the winners of the POWERless competition.

"I felt like we were doing so little," she said. "It was surprising to find out we did so much."

Geibel said the Honors Pavilion used natural sunlight, only turned on one light at a time and minimized hot water use in laundry and showers.

After finding that these methods were easy ways to save power, the residents continued practicing them for the remainder of the semester.

"Why use electricity when it's unnecessary?" Geibel said.

Siciliano said the Office of Sustainability hoped students would become more aware of energy conservation by learning "different things they can do to bring into their everyday lives, and at home, too."

During the fall 2010 POWERless competition, Elon participated in Campus Conservation Nationals, a three-week competition among universities to conserve the most electricity and water. Elon's spring competition will only be taking place on campus among residence halls.

Elaine Durr, the sustainability coordinator, said students living in the

winning residence halls would each receive a sustainable T-shirt. In addition, Durr said these areas will have their names added to the POWERless trophy, which is located in Moseley Center.

In addition to the POWERless competition, the university also takes part in an on-campus recycling challenge, RecycleMania.

Rather than energy reduction, the goal of this competition is to raise awareness among students about waste reduction.

The eight-week event also allows residence halls to compete against one another, each seeking to have the largest amount of recyclables per capita.

RecycleMania is a competition among colleges and universities around the country, but Elon does not compete against other schools. Molly Strayer, a senior intern in the Office of Sustainability, said Elon is in the Benchmark category, as its results are recorded but not included in official rankings.

Strayer said Elon reports its weekly progress in pounds and compares results from year to year. The overall goal is "to do better than the results from last year," Strayer said.

The Loy Center placed first in the school's RecycleMania competition last year, collecting a total of 2,088 pounds of recyclables during the eight-week period.

This year's RecycleMania competition will be held Feb. 6 to April 2.