

New College Environmental Studies Program

By Jillian Walker, New College student

Many academically ambitious students dream of Harvard, Yale, or Cornell, where prestigious doctors, lawyers, and investment bankers have been bred. But when an equally ambitious Floridian dreams of a unique educational experience from which to gain the tools necessary for a career in environmental, "green," sustainable technology and business, Sarasota's own New College proves to be an exceptional solution. While the big universities have the benefit of state-of-the-art research facilities and incredible, densely varied libraries, New College has an atmosphere and a history built upon common dreams and desires for a personally responsible education that involves exploring and polishing one's intellectual capacity with a unique collection of passionate teachers and students. And it provides an environment in which progress is based on and defined by true capability and real mastery, rather than letter grades and credits.

New College, Florida's public liberal arts honors college, has proved to be the perfect place to cultivate the knowledge, skills, and ideas necessary for a career in the field of environmental management, research, policy, and procedures. In my lifetime, I would like to have contributed to the spread of greater consciousness and concern for the content and quality of humankind's water, food, and air supply as well as concern for the effects of social activities, appliances, and entertainment that use these resources which fuel our economy. The Environmental Science program will aid me greatly in this endeavor.

John Elmendorf, as then president of New College, announced plans in January of 1972 for an Environmental Studies Fund. Originally, the Environmental Studies program at New College strived to tap into local community support for the young college at a time when environmental topics were hot topics, in order to fund and enable research scientists to involve students in studies aimed at improving local environmental policy. This early approach didn't last; mid-70s professor of biology Dr. John Morrill

reshaped the program, and students soon took directional responsibility of environmental studies. The program soon gained regional prominence. Dr. Morrill developed special projects, emphasized regional research and student grant proposals, produced ESP publications, and stressed the importance of communication and first-hand knowledge by actively including students in conferences, symposia, and field sites.

The ES program was revitalized by Dr. Ernie Estevez in 1977 through expansion and improvements in resource acquisi-



Jillian Walker studies on the New College campus.

tion. Then graduates Julie Morris and Jono Miller took over as program coordinators in 1981. 1984 saw the faculty establishment of the Environmental Studies Steering Committee (ESSC), which evaluates the program, adopts graduation requirements, plans academic offerings, and reviews student research proposals. Preparation of a research grant proposal and approval by the ESSC is one graduation requirement for ES students.

Many improvements have been implemented since; introductory courses and practicum have been added, graduation requirements revised, and Miller and Morris became program directors. The past three years have seen the arrival of two incredibly capable and respected faculty additions. Dr. Frank Alcock arrived in 2003, and acclaimed ecologist, canopy researcher, and author Dr. Margaret Lowman arrived in 2004 as the ES program's Director of Environmental Initiatives and the first official Environmental Studies professor.

Now into its fourth decade, the ES program has prepared 166 graduates

with an environmental studies area of concentration for roles in environmental management and research. Of this 166, 59 have gone on to obtain higher degrees, nine of which are earning a PhD, 11 a Juris Doctorate, and 39 obtaining a master's degree in various areas ranging from science and art to public policy and regional planning. General career paths for a graduate include the title of environmental scientist, consultant, ecologists, biologist, teacher, attorney, and organic farmer. All of this information and more, including local and regional organizations working with graduates, are available on the ES website at www.ncf.edu/academics/env/index.html.

With such a rich history and bright future, environmentally passionate students like myself find a niche at New College. Though it isn't always the easiest subject area to stomach, the program provides a wonderful support system. One of my favorite courses, American Environmental History, while revealing a stark reality we all must eventually face, also presents refreshingly enlightening subject material that inspires the possibility of positive change.

With 18 graduation requirements, an ES student must be dedicated and prepared for commitment. Responsibility for one's environment includes intricately understanding the hows and whys. How can I effectively communicate sustainable living principles? How can I help change people's lives for the better? Why do McDonald's French fries appeal more to the seventh grade students I teach about environmental science (through a program at New College) than a juicy mango? Why do they prefer soda over fruit smoothies? How can I change their minds? These are just some of the questions I will be answering through New College's ES program, a program and place I am so thankful for everyday. Eventually, I want to inspire other people to be thankful for such positive things, such as a juicy mango... and clean air and water. Luckily for me, I am at the right place.