

Reflections on Galapagos Development Seminar  
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The opportunity to travel to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands was truly a wonderful experience (other than the slight food poisoning). This is a place that I have only previously seen in books and movies. To see the actual location where Darwin first began his journey towards the theory of evolution by natural selection was the sort of experience that stays with you forever. However the sheer beauty of observing nature in a relatively pristine and untouched condition was what struck me as most remarkable. I am not sure I am prepared to try to create a course to return to the archipelago with students or faculty (as perhaps Wayne may in future years), but it is certain that the experience will influence my work at Berea College for years to come.

In terms of what it has taught me and what I will be bringing back to Berea is first and foremost a continued interest in the environment. In recent years I have added more environmental issues to my GSTR332 (formerly GSTR232) course, including showing the students *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore. The Galapagos gives me another angle to talk about environmental issues and the delicate balance various organisms play in an ecosystem. For instance, it is interesting to see how the various tortoise populations have been impacted on the various islands. This leads to a discussion of what is a species, ecosystem and what it means to be truly a sustainable population. The islands also provide an excellent example of ways that humans can impact the populations in a positive way (such as reviving the tortoise population on Espanola) as opposed to negative (such as driving some of the tortoise populations to extinction). Along similar lines, I suspect that when I teach GSTR332 in the 2008-2009 academic-year I will be

reformatting my course in a way that may use the Galapagos islands as a focal point to then radiate out to the various disciplines within the natural sciences.

A second piece that I am sure I will be reflecting on more and including in my GSTR332 course is the discussion of what constitutes a species and why this is a very important unit in nature and science. The readings were highly provocative and the thoughts of the non-scientists really made me evaluate my own opinions on the subject of species. In the end I am not sure that my idea of a species has changed all that much but the fact that this is something to be discussed forces me to consider how less well-informed students might view a similar subject and how I might better teach this. It is clear that this is a key starting point for any discussion of natural selection and the fact that species is not as well agreed upon as I would have thought means that I need to spend time working with my students to teach them what a species is and is not.

Another valuable piece of the Galapagos experience was spending time with some of the people outside of the science building. I would hope that this has opened lines of communication and thought that might otherwise be less clear. For instance spending time at the museum in Quito with Debra Martin and Stephanie Browner gave me a nice opportunity to talk about art and theater in a setting that probably would not have happened back at Berea. I think these contacts and discussions will be helpful if and when I begin to teach some of the other GSTR courses (in particular 110 once we finish the faculty searches in ecology/biology/geochemistry/geophysics). This is not to say that these people would not be open to discussion of GSTR110 ideas and material before the trip but having these personal experiences helps encourage all of us to step outside our building and perhaps talk/share/interact more.

Overall, my goals from this development opportunity were to experience something new both culturally and scientifically. The readings were highly educational and I am sure that I will finish reading many of the books where we only have read a few chapters or sections. The contacts with other faculty are going to aid me in the future, particularly as it appears I may be moving into GSTR110 at some point and will need non-scientists to help direct me down a reasonable path in this course. I am aware that this was not an inexpensive journey to take and for the financial support of the Mellon Foundation and Berea College, I am very grateful. I anticipate that the effect of this trip will be felt in all of my courses to varying degrees in coming years and it may even embolden me to conceive my own travel courses in the future in the model of other Berea College faculty members.