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Press release : 2015 : 07 : 29 : Learning Journeys Promote Success, Retention

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USFSP News

Learning Journeys Promote Success, Retention

Over the summer, USF St. Petersburg students participated in Learning Journeys, short educational sessions offered to incoming freshmen. The sessions, held both on and off campus, allowed faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences to immerse students in their field of study while physically placing them in those environments.

Incoming freshmen have attended the eight sessions that have been offered thus far. The journeys spanned across several fields of study, including anthropology, biological sciences, literature, art and psychology. Students explored the behaviors and emotions of animals, participated in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony and took part in a live digital painting demonstration, among other activities.

Learning Journeys provide academic engagement opportunities for new students to become engaged. Terrye Wilson, program director of TRiO Student Support Services, said that research indicates that students who develop personal connections with faculty are more likely to be retained at the institution.

“The journeys are fun outings in a relaxed, informal setting that facilitate connection with faculty and provide exposure to areas of academic inquiry that students may have never considered,” said Wilson, who currently oversees the program. The Learning Journeys programs were planned by Matt Morrin, Director of Student Life & Engagement, and Dr. Susan Toler, assistant dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. John Arthur, associate professor of anthropology at USFSP, took four USFSP undergraduate students and a graduate assistant from USF Tampa to Weedon Island Preserve on Friday, July 24. He shared about his experiences and role in excavation as part of one of his archaeology courses.

Arthur, who often works in Ethiopia and can only take a couple of students each time he visits, began teaching a course called Seminar in Archaeological Method and Theory in 2006. During the course, students spend five full days excavating at the Weedon Island site. Weedon Island is the type site for the entire Weedon Island archaeological culture and is one of the largest surviving shell mounds in the Tampa Bay region.

The Learning Journeys session provided a brief glimpse into the experience for the four undergraduate students enrolled in Arthur’s Introduction to Anthropology course. The group trekked out on foot for 30 minutes into areas of the island normally closed off to the public to visit archaeological dig sites, some of which were looter holes.

“This gives more students the opportunity to learn how to do archaeology and see if they wish to pursue this as a career,” said Arthur, who encourages students to become involved in graduate-level research as undergraduates. “We excavate there every two years and have the students clean, sort, catalog, and analyze the material in my lab.”

Wilson said the Learning Journeys will start up again in the fall semester and will expand to include the College of Education and Kate Tiedemann College of Business.



Dr. John Arthur shows an archaeological dig site to students during his Learning Journey session titled “Discovering Weedon Island.”



USF St. Petersburg freshman students and faculty member Dr. John Arthur trek through Weedon Island Preserve to one of the dig sites.





Participants in Dr. Kathy Arthur's "Queen of Sheba Coffee Ceremony" Learning Journey session partake in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony.



Students and staff participate in a traditional Ethiopian coffee ceremony in Tampa. From left: Dr. Kathy Arthur, Associate Professor; Priscilla Goodwin-Serra, advisor for TRiO Student Support Services; Siera Voegtle, education freshman; Erica Campbell, coordinator of Multicultural Affairs; and Annie Schneider, interdisciplinary social science freshman.

