Education, public involvement & NGO role, media role

Integrated Learning And The Chesapeake Semester

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The Chesapeake Semester at Washington College offers an integrated approach to undergraduate education focused on a single coastal system, the Chesapeake Bay. The semester's four interdisciplinary courses are taught concurrently, incorporating traditional lectures with in-depth stakeholder discussions, extensive field experiences on the bay and in its watershed, and a comprehensive exploration of management policy through visits with governmental personnel and members of non-governmental advocacy groups in the states of Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. In addition, the program incorporates technological aids for learning and communicating with both local and global communities concerned with the environmental management of enclosed coastal seas. Although the focus of the program reflects our institution's location, the Chesapeake Semester attempts to identify differences and similarities with other coastal systems through a comparative study involving a two-week exploration organized by our partner institution in Peru, the Centre for Environmental Sustainability of the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia. The Chesapeake Semester's unique structure allows a small group of students to remain together for an entire semester during which the program is their only academic responsibility. This facilitates some of the distinctive traits of the program, namely extended travel, far-reaching discussion, and the opportunity for learning at any time of day. This program structure also promotes the integration of all aspects of the academic experience, reflecting a belief that understanding, for example, biology or economics alone will not provide information sufficient for recognizing and solving today's complex and interwoven challenges for more effective coastal seas' management. The Chesapeake Semester also attempts to prepare its students to communicate what they have learned more effectively, using both traditional verbal/written means as well as electronic and social media, to a variety of audiences from all ages, experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Still, as graduates of the Chesapeake Semester from two different of the program's four years, we find challenges remain in taking full advantage of this kind of experiential and admittedly experimental style of learning. Our presentation will focus on exploring the effectiveness of such a comprehensive, integrated approach to environmental education. In particular, we ask if the limited knowledge and experiences of undergraduates hampers their ability to learn from such an academic experience, and if an integrated approach has proven as valuable

as expected. We will conduct a global review, highlighting elements of similar programs for comparison. We conclude that such concerns are more challenges than limitations, and that the experience is a window through which students may learn to view themselves as active participants in the management of enclosed coastal seas, and our world.