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University of Idaho Wins \$3.2 Million Renewal of Interdisciplinary Graduate Research and Education Project

MOSCOW, Idaho – A successful educational partnership between the University of Idaho and Costa Rica's Tropical Agricultural Research and Higher Education Center to train graduate students will continue with a \$3.2 million grant from the National Science Foundation.

The Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship program, or IGERT, is the National Science Foundation's flagship interdisciplinary training program. It educates doctoral-level scientists and engineers by building on the foundations of their disciplinary knowledge with interdisciplinary training.

The new five-year grant follows an earlier IGERT project funded in 2001 that trained 20 doctoral students through research on biodiversity conservation and sustainable production in agricultural and forested areas in Idaho and Costa Rica.

The renewal grant will support 24 new doctoral students who will work in teams. The interdisciplinary teams will include 32 University of Idaho professors drawn from four colleges, said Nilsa Bosque-Perez, an entomology professor who will continue to direct the program. Twelve faculty members from the Costa Rican institute, CATIE, will also participate in the effort.

In addition to Bosque-Perez, University of Idaho professors Sanford Eigenbrode, J.D. Wulfhorst, Jo Ellen Force, Lisette Waits and Penny Morgan took the lead in developing the project.

The four colleges include Agricultural and Life Sciences, Natural Resources, Science, and Letters, Arts and Social Sciences.

"The research and educational experiences we provided were transformational for our original students and we intend to make it more so for the new crop of fellows. Our faculty teams also benefitted from the opportunity to work with the student teams and with each other in an international setting," Bosque-Perez said.

The program emphasizes using teamwork to address broader research questions and allows students to create important networks and prepare for leadership positions in diverse fields.

The original IGERT participants now hold jobs at universities ranging from Alaska to Puerto Rico and Auburn to Oregon. Some work for groups including the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International.

Wayde Morse, a 2007 IGERT graduate, credited the program's influence with helping him in his new role as an assistant professor of forestry and wildlife sciences at Auburn University in Alabama.

"The international research exposure that I was able to develop during my IGERT fellowship has provided me the background and credibility to develop new international natural resources courses in my current profession," Morse said.

He will take Auburn students to Costa Rica to experience first-hand the ecological implications and livelihood benefits of Costa Rica's environmental service payment program.

Jan Schipper, a current IGERT student, is the director of global mammals assessment for Conservation International, an organization that empowers societies to responsibly and sustainably care for nature for the well-being of humanity. Schipper leads numerous interdisciplinary teams around the world to improve species conservation by addressing issues of global economic and climate change.

"The ability to work on a thesis internationally was one of the real selling points for me to join the program," said Schipper. "The IGERT interdisciplinary experience has opened doors for me that I did not even know existed."

Leigh Winowiecki graduated in 2008 with a joint doctoral degree from Idaho and CATIE, and is now a fellow at Columbia University's Earth Institute working in Africa.

"I love coming into a place and learning about it and how people live and survive on this landscape," Winowiecki said of her time in Costa Rica. "The farmers taught me so much."

IGERT graduate Shannon Donovan recently joined the University of Alaska faculty in Anchorage as an assistant professor of resilience social science.

"The skills I gained as an IGERT student provided me with valuable interdisciplinary communication tools that transcend my doctoral work at the University of Idaho. My inclination to conduct interdisciplinary research focused on complex land-use challenges is a direct result of my IGERT experiences," Donovan said.

"At UAA, I will continue working across disciplines to better understand the effects of environmental challenges including climate change and natural disasters on people in the polar north," Donovan added.

"The interdisciplinary research component was one of the most significant aspects of my graduate education," said Yaniria Sanchez-de Leon of the University of Puerto Rico at Utuado. "The IGERT program helped me to develop the ability to work along with scientists of different disciplines and expand my capacity to perform research."

Sanchez-de Leon, who in 2005 rediscovered the giant Palouse earthworm during fieldwork in native prairie, continues her interest in earthworm science. She recently received an award from the National Science Foundation to work with ecologists and geochemists on an interdisciplinary study of the role of earthworm in soil carbon sequestration.

As in the earlier program, the students will spend time studying and conducting research in Idaho or Costa Rica with mentors mainly from the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and the College of Natural Resources.

The project will focus on the social, political, economic, biological and physical drivers of change that affect resilience of ecological and social systems, and how to manage the environmental and social challenges arising from such change.

The program will offer undergraduate students at the University of Idaho the chance to work on graduate students' research projects.

All IGERT students will spend time in both Idaho and Costa Rica working to understand how the two countries problems are similar, and how they are unique. "Students will work closely with the local communities to link their studies with the needs of the communities," Bosque-Perez said.

The National Science Foundation funds the program to stimulate collaborative research that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries and requires teamwork. Students gain the tools to become leaders and are prepared to solve large and complex research problems of significant scientific and societal importance at the national and international level.

Since 1998, the IGERT program has made 215 awards to more than 100 lead universities in the U.S. and provided funding for nearly 5,000 graduate students.

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About the University of Idaho

Founded in 1889, the University of Idaho is the state's flagship higher-education institution and its principal graduate education and research university, bringing insight and innovation to the state, the nation and the world. University researchers attract nearly \$100 million in research grants and contracts each year; the University of Idaho is the only institution in the state to earn the prestigious Carnegie Foundation ranking for high research activity. The university's student population includes first-generation college students and ethnically diverse scholars. Offering more than 130 degree options in 10 colleges, the university combines the strengths of a large university with the intimacy of small learning communities. For information, visit www.uidaho.edu.