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Students use parks as classrooms

By Dave Robbie

Some students in the SUNY ESF tourism planning class are learning more than just concepts from their textbooks and lectures.

Instead, they are working with the Syracuse Parks Department to help develop a plan to increase tourism at major parks in and around Syracuse. State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry students will submit their plan to the public at the end of the semester, after which the Syracuse public will debate and implement the changes.

Professor Diane Kuehn feels confident about the class's progress and eventual impact on the community.

"I would estimate that in 10 years, most of our recommendations will be in place," Kuehn said.

This time period is normal, Kuehn said, due to the review process that each of the students' recommendations must go through by local communities and the Parks Department.

Kuehn learned the process through teaching other classes with similar agendas. Her previous classes have focused on the Black River in Watertown and a scenic route on Lake Ontario.

Students will base their recommendations to the parks system by taking into account how they are used and promoted. The class' suggestions are expected to cover the renovation of park facilities, ways to connect parks both within and outside of the city and promotion of the parks in general. Students in the class will be working to accommodate the communities surrounding the parks and the Parks Department itself. The class toured some of Syracuse's parks Aug. 28 to help them better understand the department's ideas and how the class's recommendations would fit in with them.

"The applied nature of the class is very neat," said Paul First, a SUNY ESF graduate student. "To be able to work on something that will help improve the community [makes this class special]."

Glen Lewis, an administrative analyst for the Parks Department's office of planning and development, was also excited about the participation of the class.

"We are going to have 12 bright young people who, while learning about tourism promotion, will be helping out the Syracuse parks," Lewis said. "This is fantastic stuff for us. We don't have the people in our staff to focus on these kind of issues."

This is not the first time that classes from ESF have helped out the Parks Department - nor will it be the last, according to Syracuse's Parks Commissioner Patrick Driscoll.

"They've been very instrumental in the master plans for the parks," Driscoll said. "Once a month it seems like we are doing stuff with them. When you have a world-renown college right here in Syracuse, it is important to tap into it."

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