By Sapna Kollali
Staff writer

The future scientists who save an endangered species, decontaminate a polluted water body or reverse the effects of acid rain could be sitting in a Central New York classroom.

Eighteen local high schools are working with the state College of Environmental Science and Forestry this year to run a Global Environment course through the “ESF in the High School” program.

The three-credit college course focuses on ecosystems, sustainability of natural resources, population growth and relationships between organisms and the environment.

“This course really sits at the nexus of the natural and social sciences,” said Rick Beal, an educational outreach associate for ESF in the High School. “The corps of schools is growing fast. The environment is a hot topic.”

The core component of the course is a year-long, inquiry-based study on an environmental topic of the student’s choosing — the results of which they have to orally or visually present on

Chittenango High School seniors (left to right) Adam Wayne, 17, Alex Kraus, 18, and Emily Murray, 17, participate in a debate about genetically modified foods during Global Environment, a course being offered in high schools around New York by the state College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Their team argued against genetically modified foods.

ESF’S ‘GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT’ COURSE GIVES HIGH SCHOOLERS A TASTE OF COLLEGE

EDUCATORS HOPE TO INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM-SOLVERS

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— Joe Boronczyk, Corcoran High science teacher
the ESF campus in the spring. At Corcoran High School, in Syracuse, students are studying the effects of road salt on plants, testing the air quality inside their school and looking at acid rain’s effects on soil in different parts of Onondaga County, science teacher Joe Boronczyk said.

“It’s interesting for the kids because they’re doing real science. They’re going out and getting field samples instead of just reading about it in a textbook,” he said. “We hope to inspire some kids to be scientists and work in the field.”

Beal also has a $1.6 million, three-year National Science Foundation grant that pays nine graduate students to work with participating high schools. The grant covers their tuition and a stipend, said Beal.

Just one of the nine Global Environment students at Chittenango High School wants to work in the environmental science field, but all are excitedly working on their research projects. They include studying the captive breeding programs of the red pandas in zoos across the country, assessing the health of fish living in water bodies near nuclear power plants and treating invasive plant species near Green Lakes State Park.

“It’s just cool to be learning things that are going on right now,” Chittenango senior Greg Infantine said. “I think a lot more now about where my food comes from and if it’s local and how much energy I use.”

Beal, who also teaches the course to ESF undergraduates, said just three schools signed on a decade ago when the Global Environment high school course debuted. This school year, 25 high schools in 11 counties — including the High School of Environmental Studies in Manhattan — are offering it. Next year, that number is expected to jump to 34 schools in 15 counties.

Among next year’s newcomers is West Genesee, in Camillus, and Karen Kotlar will likely teach the course.

“It’s an interesting approach for all students, not just the science-oriented, to think about the world they live in and issues they will certainly have to deal with,” she said.

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