

Food Forever in Thailand

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There are some courses that students take and completely forget about by the time a new semester starts. However, some classes leave a lasting impact. Food Forever, PSSC 390, teaches students about agricultural sustainability. It can be taken either online, on the Chico State Campus, or in abroad during summer intercession and is the most popular course for students who select Theme C for their upper-division general education requirement.

Students who are looking for the adventure of taking the course abroad travel to Thailand for three weeks in June for an intensive version of normally 15-week course. "It is very intensive," said Lee Altier, the course instructor. Altier started the Thailand version of Food Forever three years ago after traveling there on a full bright sabbatical, teaching agricultural ecology alongside Dr. Sakda. Sakda and Altier now teach the Food Forever class during the summers together.

The Thailand version of the course is offered to all Chico State students. However, only about 7 to 15 students actually take advantage of the opportunity to get abroad, compared to the more than 250 students that the class either online or on campus. Altier's students are put into groups with Sakda's Thai students in order to help the Americans better adapt to the culture more efficiently, said Ted Kingsley, who took the course abroad in the summer of 2008.

Kingsley is an Agricultural Business student at Chico State, who took the course as an upper-division elective, he said. "I wouldn't have taken it on campus," he said. "It was an excuse to go to Thailand." Kingsley was one of only five students that took the course in Thailand in 2008. "One of the major challenges was that there were not enough of us to get a group rate on flights, so we had to do it ourselves," Kingsley said.

Kingsley and another student arrived in Bangkok a few days before the rest of the group and were able to travel around the area and get a feel for the Thai lifestyle, he said. Classes start just a few days after the students arrive in Chang Mai and go from 8 to 11 a.m. during the week, followed by field trips in the afternoon, Kingsley said. "One day we went to an orphanage, another we played with baby tigers and road elephants," he said.

After classes and field trips the students are able to explore on their own. "We would go to random markets and play soccer with the Thai students," he said. "They would show us good places to eat because they knew where all the cheap things were." Students stay in a hostel-style dorm on the university campus in Chang Mai, but get the opportunity to stay with a host family for a night, Kingsley said.

Along with Food Forever, students also take a language and culture class throughout their trip. "One of my aims is that besides teaching resource management and the culture is for

students to be comfortable traveling and living in Thailand,” Altier said. Most students take time after the course to travel on their own, Kingsley spent a total of seven weeks abroad in the summer. “It was so fantastic because I traveled by myself,” Kingsley said. “I met so many random people I wouldn’t have met if I had stayed in my own little clique.”

The course will be expanding in 2009, adding an option for students to go to Nepal to take the course. The Nepal version will be a bit more intense for students, Altier said. But it still emphasizes agricultural sustainability. “We can only read and discuss these things in class,” he said. “To actually be out talking to farmers about the erosion and the competition with China is very real.”