


Ohio Wesleyan Magazine
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HOW A NEW ACADEMIC CURRICULAR INITIATIVE IS PREPARING WORLD-SAVVY LEADERS



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14 Sharing Knowledge in a Shared World

Thanks to Ohio Wesleyan's new curricular initiative, The OWU Connection, close to 170 professors and students already have participated in an array of theory-to-practice and travel-learning trips to more than 30 countries. We asked several of our travelers to tell us about what they say are among the best learning experiences of their lives.

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UC 160: The Connection is a pilot academic course designed to connect first-year students to Ohio Wesleyan and to each other.

26 Launching OWU's Course Connections Networks

Presenting single subjects from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints best describes OWU's networks of courses to be introduced during the 2011-2012 academic year. The results? A more comprehensive and creative manner of looking at the world.

ON THE COVER: Photos taken by OWU students and faculty were used to create the cover graphic produced by Doug Thompson and Sara Stuntz. The images represent many but not all of the places our travel-learning courses and TiPiT projects took place this past school year.



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Spreading Her



NEW FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR KRISTEN LEAR '11 REFLECTS ON THE IMPACT OF OWU'S THEORY-TO-PRACTICE PROGRAM ON HER LIFE.

Wings

AS THE SUN RISES, I stand among the pecan trees in the early morning dew and watch, with tears in my eyes, as 28 bats swirl around and enter one of the bat houses I had built and installed as part of my Senior Honors Thesis at Ohio Wesleyan. At that moment, I saw the months of hard work and planning pay off. This is what I had been striving for since my honors project first took shape.

However, the path to that project began much earlier in college. After sophomore year, I made a choice that turned out to be a watershed decision in my life. Although paid internships were available, I followed my passion for bats and accepted an unpaid research position studying the role of bats in a Texas pecan agroecosystem. What many people may not know about bats is how important they are both ecologically and economically to our world, as they help to maintain healthy ecosystems and also act as natural pest control agents. The pecan nut casebearer moth (*Acrobasis nuxvorella*), one of the most devastating pests of pecan trees, is, in fact, part of the diet of several bat species in Texas. And as the only flying mammals, bats live on every continent except Antarctica.

I spent the summer of my sophomore year stumbling around in the dead of night (our typical work night lasted from 7 p.m. to 9 a.m.) catching bats. While the work was sometimes grueling (lifting 30-meter poles and pounding rebar into the ground to set up the nets is no easy task), and at times my body wanted to succumb to sleep,

I discovered that this is exactly what I want to do: to be outdoors while investigating important aspects of the natural world.

A year and much hands-on bat work later, I received a theory-to-practice grant from Ohio Wesleyan to implement my Senior Honors Thesis project. I traveled back to Texas to determine the most effective bat house design for Evening Bats (*Nycticeius humeralis*), a species that may be especially beneficial in pest suppression because they consume pecan pests. After three weeks of long days in the workshop amidst the haze of sawdust, I finished building and installing nine pairs of bat houses, each pair having one standard house (like the typical bat houses that people put in their backyards) and one rocket box (with the roosting chambers built around a single pole). I monitored each house for exploratory behavior with a thermal imaging camera and for bat occupancy by documenting the presence of guano beneath the roost. While the difficulties of my project were not insignificant — ranging from walking into electric fences or through painful white prickly poppies in the pitch black of night, and even having my guano collection bins smashed by annoyingly curious bovines—those challenges all faded into irrelevance when I watched 28 bats enter one of the bat houses. My project had successfully gone from the initial “theory” stages of planning to the “practice” stages with tangible results, and I couldn’t have been more elated.

Now, I’m officially an OWU graduate and was back in Texas until the end of June to do a small follow-up study on the bat



house project. I hoped to determine if the bats were using the houses, and if so, how many were in each house. I counted more than 350 bats in one of the rocket boxes and more than 150 in one of the standard houses. It looks as if the houses have been successful! This was my third year in Texas working with bats, and these experiences would not have been possible without support from Ohio Wesleyan’s theory-to-practice program. Through a TiPiT grant, I have discovered my passion for bat research and have gained a better appreciation of the work that goes into scientific research and the joys of watching a carefully planned project blossom and hard work pay off. I will be heading to Australia this fall for a Fulbright project studying a colony of critically endangered Southern Bent-wing Bats (*Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*) in South Australia, and I know that I will use the skills I have gained in my theory-to-practice experiences to develop a successful project and to contribute to knowledge of these much-maligned animals.

KRISTEN LEAR '11
2011 Fulbright Scholar

