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Elon pilots traveling science center in Sri Lanka

This summer Elon University funded a pilot project to initiate a traveling science center in Sri Lanka. The National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka has recognized the need for science centers and has joined with Elon to collaborate on this venture.

During the Spring 2006 semester, program directors Crista Arangala, associate professor of mathematics, and Martin Kamela, assistant professor of physics, worked with Elon students to develop interactive science exhibits. These exhibits demonstrated the light spectrum, human skeleton in motion, chemistry of smell, phosphorescence, and visual perception. Each exhibit comes with a poster explaining the science behind what is seen.

Elon students involved in building the exhibits included Allison Arpin, Glenn Barnard, John Clark, Anne Garfinkel, Katherine Gosney, Joshua Guske, Kirsten Rhodes, and Patrick Tweel.

From July 2-7, these exhibits visited three locations in Sri Lanka. Arangala and Kamela were pleased to be joined by Sri Lankan undergraduate students Pubudu Weerathunga and Anjini Udagedara (University of Moratuwa), Nipuni Palliyaguru (University of Moratuwa), and Dushani Palliyaguru (Clark University), who translated the exhibit posters and interacted with the school children.

The first showing of the exhibits took place at the Samanala Children’s Home in Rattanpitya, Colombo, an orphanage for 25 boys whose parents were killed in the ethnic conflict. The exhibits were then shown to more than 200 students at the all-girls Sirimovo Bandaranaike School in Colombo, and more than 60 students from the Shatraloka Vidyala School in Karuwalabadda, a rural school in the southwest region of the island which was affected by the December 2004 tsunami.

The pilot project received extremely positive feedback from students, science...
teachers, and administrators of the three institutions. The experience of showing the exhibits in three very different settings will help guide subsequent efforts in the project. Arangala and Kamela have also met with science professors at the University of Colombo who are interested in helping make arrangement for a Winter Term study abroad class for Elon students, tentatively scheduled for January 2008. As part of this proposed Winter Term class, Elon students and Sri Lankan university students will hold a joint workshop on approaches to science education, work on translating and finishing the exhibits, and go to local schools with the traveling science center to monitor exhibit activities for school age children. Elon students can also be involved in the project on campus by building the exhibits, through either a GST course offered each semester or through a volunteer opportunity.

Elon University and the National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka will continue to collaborate on establishing the traveling science center and bringing a larger variety of mathematics and science exhibits to Sri Lanka in the near future. The five exhibits brought to Sri Lanka this summer will soon be housed in a renovated room at the National Museum in Colombo, which welcomes more than 200 children daily on school field trips.

More information on the project, updates, and photos can be found at the link below:

http://org.elon.edu/srilanka

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