

FOCUS

Teaching, Research and Outreach in
the Division of Agriculture, Forestry
and Veterinary Medicine

“How I Spent My Summer Vacation”

By Shoshana Brackett

A typical student might describe a perfect summer as one spent on the beach, soaking up the sun and enjoying the surf without worries of work or school.

Instead of relaxing during the summer break, however, many Mississippi State students put their knowledge and skills to good use by interning or working on research projects. These students work with MSU professors through the Career Center on campus and with outside businesses and organizations to get real-world experience before graduation.

Students from the Division of Agriculture, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine take on some of the most challenging

summer assignments. The 2006 summer break found these students putting their skills to work and learning new ones everywhere, from Mississippi Extension Service county offices to the mountains of Montana.

The extra work during the summer may have helped line their pockets for the upcoming school year, but more importantly, it gave them valuable experience in their chosen careers.

The following are examples of how students from the Division spent their summer “vacation.”

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES



MSU Senior Gets Turf Experience in “Big Sky” Country

Senior Jordan Carlisle traveled nearly 30 hours and 2,000 miles from Starkville this summer to learn hands-on about turf in a different geographical region.

An agronomy major with an emphasis in golf and sports turf management, Carlisle interned this summer at The Club at Spanish Peaks Golf Course in Big Sky, Montana. Carlisle has already completed two three-month internships but said he couldn’t pass up the opportunity to work in Montana this summer. His housing is provided, and all his expenses are covered while there.

The golf course is under construction, and Carlisle is involved in what he calls the “grow-in” of the operation, which includes sodding, heavy equipment operation, shaping turf, mowing and pesticide and herbicide application.

Mark Bradford, Carlisle’s boss at The Club, said: “We like to get a variety of students from different schools. I like to get a few kids from southern states to get them experience with the northern grasses.”

With those northern grasses comes northern weather. Despite the 8 inches of snow that fell on Memorial Day, Carlisle said, “The atmosphere is just great. The weather has just been fantastic.”

“Jordan’s doing awesome.” Bradford said. “He’s a really big asset to us.”

When he returns to MSU in the fall, Carlisle will finish two semesters of classes and then complete a final eight-month internship before graduation.

Raised on a farm, Carlisle said he chose his major and emphasis because he wanted to combine his love of the outdoors with love of sports. “Turf management seemed like something that could keep me plugged in to both the agronomy and sports interests I have,” Carlisle said.

Gregg Munshaw, assistant professor in the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, said the Golf and Sports Turf Management concentration trains students to work on golf courses, with sports turf, in lawn care and more.

With humor in his voice, Munshaw said, “Most students are training to be golf course superintendents or sports turf managers with, I think, aspirations of working for the Atlanta Braves.” But, Munshaw said those jobs are few and far between.

Like many MSU students, Carlisle said he sees himself staying in the South after graduation, though he is not opposed to moving outside of the region for a few years.

Carlisle said the MSU program helped him prepare for his internship through the three levels of training it provides. In the first level, he learned the basics such as mowing. The second level included knowledge of irrigation and pesticide and fertilizer application. The third level involved teaching the level 1 and two students.



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MSU senior Jordan Carlisle found the term "Big Sky Country" a fitting description during his summer in Montana.

Munshaw said he also encourages students to work on golf courses or sports fields to strengthen their knowledge, skills and experience.

Carlisle has worked at the MSU golf course part-time during school and said the work has been a helpful learning experience.

Munshaw noted that MSU's program is so strong that companies seek out MSU students for internships. Like other employers, Bradford said he'd be willing to hire another MSU intern after working with Carlisle this summer.

"In terms of our students, Jordan's as good as they come," Munshaw said. "He has a leader's personality, and his future is certainly bright in his profession."

Carlisle was elected the 2006-07 president of the MSU Student Chapter of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, or Turf Club.

MSU's program requires a minimum 2.5 GPA and three co-ops. Munshaw said the program is essentially 4 to 5 years long.

SUMMER

COLLEGE OF FOREST RESOURCES



Summer Internship Focuses Career Plans

Brett Cates has known since childhood that he wanted to be a forester, from the first time he rode on a bulldozer at his grandfather's logging company in Yazoo County.

However, recently Brett had been questioning his career choice. The senior forestry major co-oped for four semesters with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"After working for the corps and going through summer camp, I wasn't sure if cruising timber is what I wanted to do; I wanted to explore all of my options," Brett said.

The Strayhorn native discovered a different side to natural resources when he found an opportunity to work for the Land Bank of North Mississippi.

"I talked with graduates in forestry who worked for the Land Bank, and it seemed a natural fit," Brett said. "My father was a businessman—the regional sales manager for CMA tire brokers—and it seemed maybe I had business in my blood as well as forestry.

"I sent a letter to the executive vice president for Land Bank, Craig Shideler, and asked him for an opportunity to intern with the company," Brett added.

The initiative paid off for Brett. Shideler hired him as the first intern to work for the Land Bank.

"I have really enjoyed this opportunity," Brett said. "I am in the office about 70 percent of the time and out in the field about 30 percent, which works great for me."

The Land Bank of North Mississippi is part of the Farm Credit System established in 1916 by Congress. While primarily a financial resource to the agriculture industry, the Land Bank specializes in loans on farms, timberland, recreational properties and rural home sites.

"Foresters bring a wealth of knowledge of timber resources and wildlife habitat we need to fulfill our mission and meet the needs of our clients," said James Kloac, vice president of the Tupelo branch of the Land Bank of North Mississippi.

The skills Brett developed while working for the corps has paid off in his new line of work.

"Working as a park ranger for the corps helped me build my people skills," Brett said. "The ability to communicate with individuals from all walks of life plays a large role in working for the Land Bank. I have learned you wear many hats in this business, and you need to know how to relate to people and their needs.



Submitted

Office and fieldwork both were included in Brett Cates' summer internship with the Land Bank of North Mississippi. James Kloac, vice president of the Tupelo branch, helped the MSU senior forestry major learn the office responsibilities of working for the Land Bank.

"Whether it is purchasing land for a hunting club or investing in other recreational lands, I enjoy working with customers and helping them realize their dreams," Brett added.

"Brett has done an outstanding job for us, and we hope to hire him after graduation," Kloac said.