Local roots

Emily Patton
Sophomore, anthropology and psychology

Destination: El Zota Biological Field Station, Costa Rica

Patton almost wasn’t a Chapman scholar, and she’s probably thanking her lucky stars she checked her e-mail inbox when she did. Two days before the application deadline, Patton stumbled upon an e-mail sent to her by the university’s honors program outlining the Chapman Scholars Program.

As a result, he founded the Chapman Scholars Program — a yearly scholarship competition that awards funds to five of the best and brightest students from the College of Arts and Sciences to pursue a summer experience of their choice. The $5,000 award has financed trips around the globe for nine students so far.

“I am very interested in the variety of their projects. It is fascinating to see how high quality and uniqueness of their endeavors,” Chapman said.

Emily Patton, Mark Sowers and Erin Waymire were three of the five winners from 2009, and have already used their experience to give them a real-world look at their goals and aspirations.

The next few days were spent in an intensive effort at crafting two personal essays to go along with her application — describing her background, her educational goals and her summer experience interests. Patton, a native of Prairie Village, Kan., has always been interested in primates.

“K-State has a really great anthropology program, but you can’t really study monkeys in Kansas,” Patton said. “So I had picked out a few places that offered research and conservation in a field situation.”

After receiving the scholarship, she met with Chapman and his wife, Cheryl Mellenthin.

“It was intense! Mark really tested us to make sure we deserved this opportunity, asking us about our goals and our plans,” Patton said. “But he and his wife are so incredibly friendly and relatable. They told me about their own travels and gave me some advice.”

She decided to spend her summer in Costa Rica at the El Zota Biological Field Station. Having traveled to Guatemala on three separate occasions for mission trips, Patton was familiar with the exhausting process of international travel. But nothing could have prepared her for the wonder of the Central American rain forest.

“There was this simultaneous feeling of peace and excitement, being in the rain forest. You have all these new sounds and experiences, but also the tranquility that comes from being isolated from civilization. We fell asleep to the sound of rain on the tin roof every night,” Patton reminisced.

The days were spent in a combination of lectures, where she and fellow program participants from around the globe learned about research and conservation methods, and fieldwork, which was spent searching for wildlife specimens and applying the information they’d learned.

“Some days my field partner and I would not see a single monkey,” Patton said. “When we did find them, they were almost always in swamps. We’d fall into water above our knees, accidentally walk into spider webs, and mistakenly grab at trees that had thorns covering the entire trunk just to keep up with the monkey group. It was so difficult, but so rewarding.”

While Patton was able to gain experience in the field of primate research, she came away with a much more holistic view of the role of consumers.

“As consumers, we play a huge role in conservation based on our choices,” she said. “I know now that no matter where I end up in life, I can still have a big impact.”

“So many of the areas where conservation is an issue are poverty-stricken. I know now that I want to be doing something that has a direct impact in a community, which in turn impacts the surrounding environment,” Patton said.

Chapman’s philanthropy has strengthened Patton’s resolve to make a difference in the same way, should she ever have the opportunity to do so.

“I think we should give whatever we can, whenever we can,” Patton said. “We [Chapman scholars] are all using these funds to do good things in the world, so really, Mark is contributing not only to our educations, but to the improvement of society.”

Mark Sowers
Sophomore, biology

Destination: Amboseli National Park, Kenya

Mark Sowers’ dreams are as big as the creatures they involve. Ever since he can remember, he’s had a passion for pachyderms, and he decided early on that his future would be full of them. At the age of 10, he discovered the field research program at Amboseli National Park, in Kenya.

Since then, there’s nowhere else he’s wanted to be.

“The program usually only allows graduate students, so this summer...
Local roots, global pursuits

“Could you tell me really cared about what we were studying. He had researched our topics and asked us questions,” Sowers said.

While Sowers didn’t exactly spend his days “roughing it” in the bush, he did stay in a tent the entire month. His daily routine included morning outings with research assistants charting the locations of elephant families, learning how to identify individual elephants by the various vein patterns and notches in their ear flaps. In the afternoon, he’d head out with a post-doctoral researcher to study the elephants’ communication patterns.

“We’d play sounds from a speaker, like the sound of a lion roaring, and record how each group would react,” Sowers explained. “Some would huddle up, protecting the babies in the middle, some would run away. The whole thing gave me a much better idea of how research studies work.”

The experience also gave him an idea of what the overall life of a researcher would be like. After all, growing up in Spring Hill, Kan., doesn’t prepare you very well for camping on the African plains for weeks at a time.

“I learned about being able to adjust, mainly with strangers around. You’re sharing meals with them and working with them, so it’s something you have to get used to,” Sowers said. Sowers is now working on plans to apply for some of the nation’s premier scholarships, notably the Udall and Goldwater scholarships.

For some scholarships, especially the Goldwater, undergraduate research experience is essential — which is part of the reason why Chapman’s award meant so much to him.

“People always joke about how I’m not going to find any elephants to study in Kansas,” Sowers said. “So this scholarship has really opened doors for me.”

He has a long way to go, but Sowers knows that he’ll reach his goal of conducting research and advocating conservation of elephants. With help from people like Mark Chapman, his dream isn’t so out there.

“People can have sort of far-fetched dreams sometimes, but they can see so much closer with just a little help,” Sowers said. “So it’s really important for students to have this kind of opportunity.”

A full ride

In the past few years, Mark Chapman has helped enhance not just the education of various students, but also facilities and programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. His generous gifts have enabled the creation of an art gallery in Willard Hall, established the Chapman Center for Rural Studies in History, and strengthened the military history and art programs with scholarships and awards. But in summer 2009, Chapman made a commitment to the university that will bolster K-State’s ability to continue to draw the brightest and the best. He chose to establish a full-ride undergraduate scholarship.

“I don’t think giving should be a big struggle, it just felt like something I should do,” Chapman said. “I wanted to improve K-State’s ability to attract high-quality, superior students — students that may be able to obtain a prestigious scholarship like the Rhodes, Marshall or Truman.”

The scholarship will pay for tuition, fees, books, room and board for one student throughout his or her undergraduate career. While Chapman’s past contributions have been directed specifically toward the College of Arts and Sciences, the Chapman Presidential Scholarship will be available to undergraduates in any college. Though the focus of the first recipient remains to be seen, one thing is definite: the scholarship will make K-State far more competitive in terms of drawing prospective students.

“The Mark Chapman Presidential Scholarship is a contribution of historical importance to our university,” said President Kirk Schulz. “It will be one of K-State’s first full-ride undergraduate scholarships, keeping us at the forefront of the nation’s premier land-grant institutions. We are so very thankful for all Mark Chapman has done and continues to do for our university.”

Mark Sowers and Soita Saiyalel, one of the researchers at Amboseli National Park.