



News & Events

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Cal Poly Students Prepare for Trip to United Arab Emirates

SAN LUIS OBISPO – A group of Cal Poly students and faculty is preparing to spend part of its winter break examining issues such as sustainability in business, renewable energy, and women in higher education in the Middle East during a nine-day visit to the United Arab Emirates.

The trip is taking place through Cal Poly's Alternative Breaks program, which allows students to spend an academic break traveling domestically or overseas to engage in volunteer work or otherwise experience a new culture.

Five students and one faculty member will visit UAE from Dec. 14-22.

Among the group's destinations during the trip are higher education institutions such as Dubai Women's College and the American University of Sharjah; the Guggenheim Exhibit in Abu Dhabi; a community center and mosque in Dubai; a biomedical research facility; and new zero energy developments in Masdar City.

The group will attend lectures by architecture, engineering and business professors, meet and talk with students, and see the sights in the small Arab federation.

"Our team already started discussing ideas for global collaboration projects during a recent video conference with 12 of their students and five from Cal Poly," said Lori Atwater, student coordinator for the Cal Poly group. "I've sent a few business ideas for discussion by Emirate women. This is a great time for our team to learn about this rapidly changing part of the world and model efforts in global citizenship among university students."

Atwater will be joined by business-finance student Annemarie Arnold and engineering students Claire Lyle, Emily Swift and Anthony Ruh. And faculty adviser Frank Owen, a Cal Poly mechanical engineering professor currently teaching in Germany, will meet the group in UAE.

Most students are paying their way, Atwater noted. In spite of budget pressures, one department has sponsored a student. And Atwater is trying to find sponsorships that would allow two additional students to join the trip.

As the group prepares for its excursion, members are busy meeting with Cal Poly faculty and local Arab residents and experts to learn about the culture they will encounter on their trip.

Cal Poly Alternative Breaks groups have visited several different places, including multiple trips to New Orleans to help the community there in its ongoing recovery from Hurricane Katrina. Other Cal Poly students will travel to New Orleans again over the coming Winter Break.

The United Arab Emirates trip this month will be a first through Cal Poly Alternative Breaks. Atwater said it also will be the first trip in conjunction with a new program – Global Service Learning – supported by Cal Poly’s Student Life & Leadership through Student Community Services. Global Service Learning aims to foster global citizenship at Cal Poly by connecting students here with international projects and taking undergraduate research into the field for sustainable service projects.

“I’ve met many students desiring to integrate their academic coursework with real issues the world is facing, such as climate change, gender equity, religious conflict, and poverty,” Atwater said. “Students returning from UAE will engage faculty mentors in research through senior projects, independent study and group projects in their class room.

The UAE group members are available for interviews before or after their trip. To reach the team members or for more information about the trip (including helping to sponsor students) or the Alternative Breaks and Global Service Learning programs, contact Lori Atwater at 805 215-8515; latwater@calpoly.edu.

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