

Smithsonian Institution, Arizona State University announce education and research partnership in the fields of ecosystem services, sustainability, biofuels and cybertaxonomy.

Tempe, Ariz. (Feb. 12, 2010) – The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. has joined Arizona State University in an innovative education and science partnership aimed at sustaining a biodiverse planet. Today, Secretary Wayne Clough, head of the Smithsonian, and ASU President Michael M. Crow launched a global classroom – with one foot in Arizona’s Sonoran desert and the other in the tropical landscapes of Panama.

The partnership will create opportunities for ASU undergraduates, graduate students and faculty to participate in fieldwork at Smithsonian facilities in Panama, as well as for the development of virtual global classrooms that center on current research in tropical ecosystems. Smithsonian scientists will also participate in ASU degree programs.

“The Smithsonian looks forward to partnering with Arizona State to advance the goals of its new strategic plan which seeks to enhance collaborative, interdisciplinary scientific enterprise and excellence in education,” Clough said.

“Arizona State University shares the Smithsonian's goals and commitments to education, public service and the advancement of collaborative scientific engagement,” said Crow. “The new venture will foster critical thinking and intellectual growth of our students, in addition to extending the creation and application of new knowledge and engagement of our students, faculty and staff with the surrounding world.”

Academic emphasis of the new program will be on sustainability measured by studies of ecosystem services, including insect behavior and social structure in changing environments, biofuels and new world-wide web-based approaches to taxonomy.

The first research program funded by the joint venture “marries Smithsonian expertise and data on the effects of changes in forest cover on ecosystem function with ASU expertise on the economics of ecosystem services,” said ASU’s Ann Kinzig, one of the study leaders. The research will focus on the ecosystem services managed forests deliver to the Panama Canal and their importance to global commerce.

Eldredge Bermingham, director of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and Robert E. Page, Jr., dean of the ASU School of Life Sciences in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will co-direct the new program and note: “This is a natural partnership given our shared emphasis on sustainability and biodiversity studies. Through this partnership we will build joint research projects and will learn from one another in a global classroom.”

“The health of the world and its inhabitants is a moving target. Our educational programs must be structured to meet that challenge,” said Crow. “The Smithsonian is the largest research and museum complex in the world. Our exchange of experts and shared classrooms can and will catalyze learning and discovery, globally.”

“This is an exciting and significant collaboration for ASU,” said Elizabeth Capaldi, executive dean and provost of the university. “We are inspired by the many possibilities that exist within these projects to bring about lasting ecological and economic solutions in areas where some of our greatest challenges lie. Our students and faculty will benefit in countless ways from this partnership with the Smithsonian.”

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The Smithsonian Institution:

The 162-year-old Smithsonian Institution is the world's largest museum complex and research organization composed of 19 museums, nine research centers, and the National Zoo. Today, more than 500 Smithsonian staff scientists, augmented by an equal number of fellows and hundreds of international collaborators, conduct research in field stations and laboratories on all seven continents and serve as national and international experts in a wide scope of disciplines. Whether they are looking 5 million years into the past or imagining the future at the edge of the universe, our scientists are forging new paths of discovery and understanding.

About Arizona State University:

Arizona State University is creating a new model for American higher education, an unprecedented combination of academic excellence, entrepreneurial energy and broad access. This New American University is a single, unified institution comprising four differentiated campuses positively impacting the economic, social, cultural and environmental health of the communities it serves. Its research is inspired by real world application, blurring the boundaries that traditionally separate academic disciplines. ASU serves more than 64,000 students in metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona, the nation's fifth largest city. ASU champions intellectual and cultural diversity, and welcomes students from all fifty states and more than one hundred nations across the globe <http://asu.edu>

MEDIA

Margaret Coulombe (ASU)
Margaret.coulombe@asu.edu
480-727-8934

John Gibbons (Smithsonian Institution)
GibbonsJP@si.edu
202-633-5187

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY (www.asu.edu)
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (<http://clas.asu.edu>)
School of Life Sciences (<http://sols.asu.edu>)
Tempe, Arizona USA