

Eats Shoots & Leads

Aided by Marc Brody '83, students take an entrepreneurial approach to conservation at the Wolong Nature Reserve, deep in the bamboo-laden mountains of China's Sichuan Province

BY KATE SHUSTER



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CMC's leadership curriculum has taken a decidedly furry turn with the launch of an innovative partnership between the College and the famed Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan Province, China, home to the world's largest captive Giant Panda population.

Uniting the Kravis Leadership Institute and the Roberts Environmental Center with the Reserve, Marc Brody '83, president of the the U.S.-China Environmental Fund, will direct a program to support four summer internships at Wolong. Along with USCEF staff, students will monitor the panda habitat, design and implement community development projects, and document natural and cultural resources, building on work begun in Ronald Riggio's entrepreneurship practicum.

"This is what CMC is about—applying the liberal arts," says Riggio, the Henry R. Kravis Professor of Leadership and Organizational Psychology and director of the Kravis Leadership Institute. "I see this in my students, who are putting together ideas to support sustainable development programs at Wolong. They're sharing and applying everything they know."

Throughout the course, students have teamed up to generate ideas and proposals supporting Brody's work at Wolong, drawing on their different areas of expertise to engage in creative planning and

problem solving. This collaborative approach is mirrored in his larger strategy, which coordinates multi-disciplinary teams of architects and environmental professionals to transfer and adapt the best resource management practices.

“Our programs enable the sustainable stewardship of protected areas through the development of conservation economies, which place short-term economic needs within a long-term ecological context,” says Brody. “Due to recent political and economic reforms, China is developing so fast that there is an absence of planning—especially planning that is sensitive to conservation. By integrating economic and environmental development, we have the unique opportunity to be an agent of positive change.”

Brody founded USCEF in 1993, after traveling in eastern China for 10 years on behalf of his father’s import-export company. The first U.S. environmental organization to open a registered office in China, the group’s model projects for strengthening the stewardship of China’s natural and cultural resources focus on two key icons: the Great Wall and Giant Panda. Currently in development are the Panda Mountain ecotourism destination and the Wolong Panda and Conservation Institute, an integrated venture combining a conservation station, experiential learning and training center, and environmentally friendly lodge with supporting tours, restaurants, a tea house, and retail operations.

Wolong’s integration of economic and environmental sustainability has been reviewed by J. Emil Morhardt, the Roberts Professor of Environmental Biology and director of the Roberts Environmental Center, who traveled

to Wolong and Hong Kong in the fall of 2005 with his wife, Sia, adjunct professor of environmental studies at Pitzer College, observing USCEF’s projects firsthand, sitting on Wolong’s International Advisory Committee, and presenting to representatives of the Association for Sustainable and Responsible Investing in Asia.

Now Morhardt looks forward to the opportunities the new internships will provide for students. “It’s a terrific occasion to work in a rapidly developing society,” he says. “Because events are planned and completed in the course of a year or two, students can arrange to minimize the environmental impacts of a project this summer—and then the next year their plans may have happened. This is a chance to increase America’s understanding of China.”

The summer internships will allow students an insider’s view of planning, construction, and assessment of rapidly changing conditions in China’s largest panda reserve. “Students will be directly involved in these dynamic programs,” says Brody, “seeing how habitat conservation can involve indigenous communities in sustainable micro-enterprise development and learning about integrating ecological, cultural, and economic development.”

As Brody has expanded his organization’s mission and worked in areas of the world that many can only dream of, he is careful to credit his experience at CMC. “I have built upon my political science, history, and environmental education to craft innovative solutions to complex environmental challenges in China,” he says. “The strong education foundation from CMC has helped me critically analyze how to develop a strategic approach to long-term challenges.”



Wolong Summer Internships

Specific projects will take three tracks:

- **Panda Habitat:** Supported by a grant USCEF received from the National Geographic Society, students will learn how to map and monitor an important panda habitat that may be threatened by poorly planned development.
- **Community Development:** Students will work with USCEF staff to gather information for a complementary group of natural resource-based micro-enterprises, helping plan the marketing and selling of medicinal plants, organic honey and vegetables, and nursery stock to restore Wolong’s forests.
- **Ecotourism:** Students will document a range of Wolong tour programs, including a review of local books and experiential chronicling of hiking trails and destinations that will become the ecotourism program for USCEF’s Panda Mountain.

Professors Emil and Sia Morhardt, with Brody, visited Wolong in fall 2005.

