

Yale College Class of 1964

Making a Difference in Environmental Education

A summer fellowship established by the Yale College Class of 1964 enabled two Yale College architecture students last year to study how extreme climates affect the design of buildings in the Australian outback, Fiji and Iceland.

Kent Gould and Lisa Rothman, both seniors, were recipients in 2003 of the Class of 1964 Environmental Summer Fellowship. For the past three years the Class of 1964 has provided funding to sponsor summer fellowships for Yale College juniors who wish to explore an environmental project. The 2001 Class of 1964 fellow was Leah Zimmerman '02, who traveled to Buryatia, Russia, and Abhimanyu Sud '03 studied urban agriculture in Bangalore in the summer of 2002. The fellowship is administered by the School of Forestry & Environmental Studies (F&ES).

Recognizing the importance of environmental education at Yale and in honor of classmate Dean Gus Speth, the Class of 1964 has been instrumental in contributing to the successful training of the next generation of environmental leaders and citizens. The Class of 1964 has also created the Class of 1964 Environmental Initiative, which provides financial assistance to F&ES students, as well as funds that supplement F&ES teaching in the Yale College major in environmental studies.

“The purpose of the fellowship is to encourage juniors to pursue a project that expands their horizons into unfamiliar or challenging areas,” said Frank Basler, a member of the Class of 1964 who is in charge of the fellowship program. “Our hope is to identify students with leadership potential who have yet to fully commit to an environmental career, and provide them with a summer travel experience which would be impossible without our support. The fellowship is

important to the extent that it succeeds in adding to the pool of committed environmental leaders.”

Anthony Lee, class secretary, said one of the benefits of the fellowship is that it is enabling his class to get to know undergraduates. “We get to see what current students are like—see how talented and smart they are—and to try to help them along.” He also finds it personally rewarding to be connected to F&ES. “The school is doing a terrific job, especially [Dean Speth’s] effort to enhance the undergraduate curriculum with environmental studies.”

Sustainability Goes Beyond Green Design

Gould and Rothman used the fellowship to complement their academic study of architectural design in extreme climates and the work of Finnish architect Alvar Aalto. Their examination of the ways that arctic, desert and rain forest climates affect the architectural design of buildings and homes resulted in a report titled “Environmental Design in Extreme Climates,” and a presentation to the Class of 1964 class council in February.

“In our research of native buildings in arctic, desert and tropical regions, we observed examples of economically and environmentally efficient architecture,” Rothman said. “We noted many ways in which a minimalist and utterly simple home could not only exist sustainably in a harsh climate, but could cooperate and benefit from such conditions.”

Gould and Rothman observed that in Reykjavik, Iceland, many of the city’s structures are designed to deal with long periods of little to no sunlight. Buildings are not tightly spaced so as to allow light



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Leah Zimmerman



Overlooking hills (*taiga*) in Primorsky Krai, the region in Russia where Leah Zimmerman, Yale College Class of 2002, lives.

into as many openings as possible. In humid Fiji, homes sit on stilts or cement pillars above ground to take advantage of breezes. In the Australian town of Coober Pedy, many homes are built into the desert rock, which keeps interiors cool during the day and warm during the evenings. The homes are ventilated by shafts, sometimes 49 feet in length.

This semester, Rothman and Gould are participating in an international competition to design an eco-tourist lodge in Machu Picchu, Peru. The challenge is to create a sustainable hotel at the top of a mountain overlooking Machu Picchu. According to Rothman, the site is inherently unsustainable—the lodge is to rest at the top of a very steep mountain, without any natural water source, without any protection from wind and with limited access to building materials.

“I have no choice but to approach my design with a precise attention to landscape,” Rothman said. “But, to me, sustainability goes beyond green architecture. After visiting the site in Peru, I was immediately struck by cues from the harsh topography that dictated exactly why green design, efficient building materials and resource consumption are necessary for architecture to function in such conditions. However, just as vital, I noticed that a certain visual cooperation with the surrounding environment plays an equally imperative role in environmental design. I think the importance of visual sustainability cannot be ignored. That is to say, successful architecture not only pleases the land, it pleases its occupants.”

Fellowship Widened Her Perspective

Leah Zimmerman is now studying at Far Eastern State University in Vladivostok, Russia, as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. She is a full-time Russian language student, but also takes classes at the Institute of International Relations. “I am incredibly thankful for the role the Class of 1964 has played in the development of my ideals and direction thus far,” she said.

Zimmerman spent the summer of 2001 in the Republic of Buryatia, which is located in south central Asia along the eastern shore of Lake Baikal. The population of Buryatia is over 1 million people. She worked in environmental education with an organization called REAP (Rural Enterprises Adaptation Programs) International, based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. “The two months I spent in Siberia served both to solidify my attitude toward the environment and environmental education in my day-to-day life and to focus my perspective on the importance of integrating certain ideals into my life and career,” she said.

After spending the summer in Russia, she said she realized how “advanced” the environmental conscience of the average American is compared with the rest of the world. “I was surprised when I arrived in Russia to find myself relieved that in America, at least there are people who are fighting the battles that need to be fought. In Russia, trashing the environment literally is a cultural norm, both on the individual and corporate levels, and the voices of opposition are marginalized and few in number.”

Her summer in Buryatia widened her perspective on the environment in two ways: she developed an appreciation for the magnitude of Russia’s natural resources, and spending time outside of the United States has enabled her to better understand the role the United States could play as a leader in the movement toward sustainable development throughout the world.

“We have all the resources and influence needed to make decisions that will positively impact world development as it relates to the environment. I dream of a future America that makes better decisions about the environment, especially regarding energy production and consumption, and uses its role as a world leader to influence other countries’ decisions regarding the environment.” **EY**