

Parent Night Presentation

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We surveyed the parents of teens that have participated in the Global Sustainability Project (GSP) over the past four years. We asked the parents for feedback regarding the program. The feedback was universally positive. We also asked the parents what they thought it would be helpful to tell future parents who have teens interested in applying to participate. They suggested we discuss these three areas.

1. What are the objectives of the GSP?
2. Why South Africa?
3. What will the students actually be doing there?

I would like to address these questions tonight.

1. The first question was, “What are the objectives of the GSP?”

Most people in our country are aware of the need to manage and sustain our scarce resources such as water, wildlife, and coastal fishing resources. We are making a lot of efforts in Southern California with conservation of water, desalination, reclaimed water, recycling, use of green technology in building, solar and other alternate energy sources, and the use of drought tolerant plants in landscaping.

There is increasing recognition now that we live not only in a global economy but also in a global environment. Threats to the environment in one country cross national borders and can threaten the environment in another country. For instance, the effects of natural disasters such as the current California drought, the tsunami in Japan, dust storms in the Sahara as well as manmade problems such as river, ocean and air pollution cross borders and negatively affect people in other countries and continents. These events do not respect national borders. Similarly, wildlife and birds have migratory patterns that span countries and continents. A disruption of those patterns by poorly planned land development or by the use of poison on crops has international repercussions.

We also know that, to accomplish the kind of cross-border cooperation necessary to intelligently manage and sustain a global environment, we need to develop more understanding and empathy for other people’s lifestyles, values and beliefs.

This leads to the objectives of The Global Sustainability Project:

- a. To broaden the students’ understanding of another culture;
- b. To experience conservation and sustainability issues in another country very different than their own
- c. To make a direct contribution to solving environmental sustainability issues in their own community.

We hope to accomplish these objectives by selecting the students who have the potential to be future leaders and engaging them in this unique and intensive three-part program. The research expedition to South Africa is the culminating event.

- I. **Preparation:** The first part involves preparing the students for what they will see and experience. We want them to be intelligent and knowledgeable about where they will be going and what they will be experiencing – rather than to just be tourists. We want the South African research expedition to be a very rich and meaningful experience for them. Preparation is critical to accomplishing this.

Therefore, students will meet with their teacher regularly throughout the year to complete extra assignments, readings and reports. Students will also collaborate with each other to make written and oral presentations to the Foundation, parents and community focused on::

- History of South Africa
- Geography of South Africa
- Animals of the North West Province
- Plants of the North West Province
- Birds of the North West Province

- II. **Local Sustainability Project:** The second part is the local service component. The GSP scholarships are given freely to students who meet the requirements of this program. However, we do expect the students to make a meaningful contribution to their community – or to “pay forward” this opportunity given to them by the Foundation. We expect them to do real and meaningful scientific work locally as “citizen scientists” – just as they will be doing on the research expedition to South Africa. Prior to departure on the overseas expedition, students will be required to contribute a minimum of 40 hours of volunteer work during the academic year on an assigned community project organized by their teacher.
- III. **South Africa Research Expedition:** If the candidates successfully complete the requirements for the background preparation and the service component, they will receive a scholarship for the overseas expedition to South Africa. These successful students will be invited to participate in a 12-day international conservation volunteer program conducted by Earthwatch to study rhinos and other wildlife at Mankwe Wildlife Reserve and Pilanesberg National Park in South Africa.

The Foundation will pay for airfare plus the Earthwatch expedition fees – over \$6000.00/student. The student will be responsible for inoculations, clothing, gear (like boots & sleeping bag) and spending money. Funding is available if a student cannot afford these items. No student will be denied participation due to financial hardship.

[VIEW EARTHWATCH VIDEO](#)

2. This brings us to the next question: “Why South Africa?”

We did not set out with South Africa as our goal. We chose this destination after a careful selection process. We began the process by first choosing an organization to host the overseas tour. We did a thorough search of the various international conservation organizations, including the well-known ones such as Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, Heifer International as well as a number of others. As a result of this search we choose the Earthwatch Institute. Earthwatch is a nonprofit organization that has been operating for more than 40 years. They have developed an excellent infrastructure to support volunteers in their worldwide program. Unlike other overseas volunteer programs, the volunteers do real university based scientific research.

Earthwatch has 68 projects in 30 countries and over the years has recruited 100,000 volunteers to support scientific environmental research. Earthwatch currently has 19 sites around the world designated for teen tours. National Geographic ranked them as having the #1 top education program. And as important to us, they take a very serious risk management approach to their tours. They are one of the few international conservations organizations that are prepared to accommodate groups of teens.

Over the past four years, the Earthwatch team has validated our choice. They have provided an extraordinary overseas experience for GSP students to engage in scientific research.

Why did we choose South Africa rather than one of those other 18 sites? We choose South Africa because the Earthwatch program there fulfilled the four criteria that we felt were essential to the program:

- The opportunity to be involved in the local culture and community. We did not want the group to be too isolated - out in a desert or deep in bush somewhere.
- The on-site staff and scientists are engaging, personable, and student-centered. They like teenagers.
- The staff and scientists are good role models. It was important to us that there would be female scientists and staff on-site.
- The activity demands are moderate. Some of the sites are considered strenuous. We did not want to leave less athletic teens out.

Only two of the 19 teen sites could guarantee meeting all of these criteria. The South Africa program was one of them and the other was a study of insects in Latin America. The decision was an easy one to make. South Africa is where the big animals are. Perhaps subjectively, we felt it would be a much more exciting experience for the teens. South Africa is also English speaking and they have a stable, democratic government.

3. This brings us to the last parent question: “What will the students actually be doing in South Africa?”

Rather than talk about it, I would like to show you some photos taken from the GSP tours over the past four years.

[VIEW GSP SLIDE SHOW](#)

If you would like to learn more about the GSP, I suggest you go to the Foundation website at picernefoundation.org. I would particularly recommend an article there called “Walking with Purpose”. It is an excellent account of what the actual living conditions and activities are like at the Mankwe Wildlife Reserve where the students will be. It is not a promotional or marketing piece.

I would also recommend you visit the [Earthwatch Institute](http://EarthwatchInstitute) site and learn more about Earthwatch and their mission. We require that if you choose to sign your teen’s GSP application that you first go to the Conserving Endangered Rhinos in South Africa on the KAP Foundation or Earthwatch websites so you can gain an in-depth understanding of the research expedition and its requirements. The briefing has lots of details including what clothing to bring, recommended inoculations, passport requirements, weather, food, travel, Internet access, insurance, etc.

The Global Sustainability Project is unique. It is a first for Earthwatch. We are unaware of another program like it for high school youth in the U.S. What makes it unique is that this is program requires a 1 year commitment by the student of intensive study and preparation and 40 hours of community service devoted to ecological preservation or restoration. It is not just a two-week overseas holiday.

This is exactly the zone the Foundation likes to be in – creating, testing, evaluating new ideas that can have the potential for providing significant personal growth and social value and then helping others to recreate these programs in their communities. To accomplish this, we have partnered with AP Environmental Science and Biology teachers to develop a study and service program that meets the Foundation’s goals.