Faculty Mentored Research Subject of Animal Planet’s ‘Most Extreme’

This summer, research conducted by biology professor Michael Steele, Ph.D. and his students will be featured on the cable television channel Animal Planet in an episode of ‘The Most Extreme.’ The research focuses on the deceptive cache behavior of grey squirrels. “The squirrel will dig a hole, put its head in but keep the nut in its mouth,” Steele said. “It will cover the hole with leaves giving the impression it’s caching the seed.” According to Dr. Steele, the research was presented at several conferences and featured on a show by renowned wildlife researcher Sir David Attenborough which led to interest by Animal Planet. In February, a film crew from New Zealand spent approximately six hours filming Dr. Steele, his students and research colleagues from Central Connecticut State University at Kirby Park where much of the research is conducted. “It’s interesting that something as common as a squirrel can have such a complex behavior,” said senior Matt Grammond. “We fit into the title of the show perfectly, because we’re definitely the most extreme squirrel researchers.” Dr. Steele is a behavioral and evolutionary ecologist who studies the interactions between plants and their seed dispersers and seed predators. Much of his latest research, and that of his students, concerns the impact of acorn consumers on oak forest regeneration. He was recently appointed the Fenner Endowed Research Chair in Biology, a lifetime appointment based on his strong record of research productivity, student involvement in research, and peer recognition.

Students Increasingly Satisfied With Wilkes Experience

Wilkes University students are increasingly satisfied with their college experience, according to results of the 2005 Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), which showed above average performance among 10 comparison schools in New York, New Jersey, Maryland and Pennsylvania. Wilkes also performed above average among comparison schools at the national level. The SSI is a survey of approximately 800 undergraduate, pharmacy and graduate students conducted every two years to gauge both the importance of and satisfaction with a wide range of college experiences. The survey shows that Wilkes students are most satisfied with academic advising, instructional effectiveness, campus life, campus support services, and service excellence. These categories closely match what students say are most important to them. The survey also shows increased satisfaction with campus security, parking and the delegation of student activity fees. “When we see results like these improving satisfaction numbers, it helps explain why more students are choosing to enroll at Wilkes and why our retention is increasing,” said Michael Frantz, Vice President for Enrollment and Marketing. “We’re pleased that our students continue to provide us feedback on how we can improve their college experience.” Students say their academic advisors provide personal attention and concern for their individual success and believe in the university’s commitment to academic excellence. Students also note that faculty are fair and unbiased in the treatment of individual students.

Accounting Students Offer Free Tax Assistance

For the 22nd consecutive year, junior accounting students in the Jay S. Sidhu School of Business and Leadership offered free tax assistance to the public through the IRS Volunteer Return Preparation Program. Each Saturday during the month of February, students helped elderly and lower-income individuals prepare and file basic federal and state tax returns. In total, more than 300 returns were prepared.
The running club’s second annual Relay for Heat helped raise more than $3,000 for the Martin Luther King Fuel Fund. Pictured from left are Andrew Julian, running club member, Dr. William Terzaghi, associate professor of biology and running club advisor and Jared Shayka, running club president.

Students Help Avert Home Heating Crisis
This winter, Wilkes’ running club raised nearly $3,000 to help avert the home heating crisis through the second annual Relay for Heat. More than 20 runners including Wilkes students, faculty, staff and community members participated in the 100-mile relay at Kirby Park. Proceeds from the Relay for Heat were donated to the Commission on Economic Opportunity’s Martin Luther King Fuel Fund. “Funds raised from this event will help working families with small children, the disadvantaged and elderly stay warm this winter,” said David Ritter, director of housing and community services at the Commission on Economic Opportunity. The average heating bill was estimated to be 50 percent higher than last winter’s costs.

School of Pharmacy Offering Heart Health Screenings
Wilkes University recently received a $10,000 grant from the Blue Ribbon Foundation of Blue Cross of Northeast Pennsylvania to support a year-long Cardiovascular Health Initiative designed to raise awareness of cardiovascular disease risk factors, provide education on lifestyle changes, and screen patients in a community pharmacy setting. Through the Initiative, a series of free heart health screenings will be available for area residents who are interested in identifying their risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The screenings will be administered by Dr. Julie Olenak, Pharm.D., ’03 assistant professor of pharmacy practice, and pharmacy student Meghan Calpin ’07. Based on recommendations from the American Heart Association, the screenings consist of a total cholesterol panel, a blood glucose reading, blood pressure reading, and measurements of the waist. Participants are given a ten-year risk analysis for heart disease, heart health literature, and suggested lifestyle changes so they may reduce their risk of heart disease. The results are also reported to the patients’ physician for review and discussion. An estimated 4,600 residents of Luzerne County die each year from heart disease, the nation’s number one killer. The implications for the prevention and treatment of heart disease are significant with an estimated 47 million adults currently at risk.

Record Number of Wilkes Students Land Internships
Nearly 100 Wilkes students are interning with area businesses and organizations this semester, a 40 percent increase from last spring. The increase in internship placements is attributed to faculty support and encouragement, positive work experiences with Wilkes students and strong relationships with the business community. Students are interning in a variety of industries including health care, banking, engineering, adolescent counseling, marketing, communications, law and criminal justice. According to Sharon Castano, cooperative education and internship coordinator, the internships allow students to see the relationships between their course work and actual jobs, meet potential employers, network, gain employment references, establish relationships with mentors and increase technical skills in laboratory and computer facilities.