



The Advanced Inquiry Program Honors Recent Graduates and Looks Ahead to the Future

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In 2013, San Diego Zoo Global (SDZG) expanded its horizons as a conservation leader to offer the Advanced Inquiry Program (AIP), a master's degree program that is co-delivered using a hybrid online/in-person format with Miami University's Project Dragonfly. AIP is nationally recognized and growing—the San Diego Zoo is one of eight zoo partners with Project Dragonfly, and five additional zoo and aquarium partners are set to join the national team in 2017. We are proud to announce that we have 75 students currently enrolled, and our first class of 21 students graduated in December 2015!



AIP has proven to be an exciting endeavor for SDZG because it perfectly aligns with our institutional goals. It unites people from around the San Diego area who share an interest in conservation and a drive to become active members of local and global conservation communities. Students develop networks with staff and other locally based classmates, and connect with the national web-based Project Dragonfly community. From the moment they begin the program, students engage in hands-on, inquiry-based activities that empower them to ask the right questions and seek answers, strengthen their understanding of current and future conservation issues, and enact plans to lead the fight against extinction by promoting positive social and ecological change within their broader communities. With their help, we are successfully extending and deepening our reach to ignite a passion for nature in others. The following stories of our recent 2015 alumni exemplify these qualities and demonstrate the AIP flexibility that allows students to tailor the graduate program to fit their background, strengths, and personal goals.

Stephanie Alexander has worked in the San Diego Zoo's Education Department for over 10 years. Her master plan is to "create environmental stewards through education." She uses education to help people identify personal behaviors that negatively impact the environment and to promote change. During AIP, she evaluated the effectiveness of the Zoo's education programs, incorporated guest inquiry into animal presentations to promote audience engagement, and continually strives to identify specific actions people can take to help the environment and wildlife. Like many AIP participants, she uses what she learned during her Master of Arts degree while on the job and to inform her personal choices.



Jeff Kepper is a science teacher at Helix High School in San Diego who is passionate about marine biology. He set forth to "strengthen students' conservation attitudes through marine science activities" as his graduate program master plan. Guided by the four AIP tenets (inquiry, local and regional understanding, community participation and voice, and ecological stewardship), he has developed course curricula that give his students the opportunity to play active roles in marine conservation initiatives. They collect scientific data on field trips to coastal habitats in Southern California, and they take part in long-term conservation monitoring projects with professionals. Jeff uses his Master of Arts degree and master plan to continue to inspire his students to become stakeholders in local conservation issues.



Members of our inaugural cohort are now entering the community as San Diego Zoo AIP alumni, and while their accomplishments in the program are highly commendable, AIP is designed to equip students with the tools to successfully lead long-term community action. So their work has only just begun, and the future looks very bright! We are also looking to the future in anticipation of the next incoming cohort of students, who are ready to pursue this one-of-a-kind graduate degree as an opportunity for professional development, personal growth, community involvement, and environmental stewardship.

Applications are open until February 28, 2016; visit us at www.sandiegozooglobal.org/aip to learn more!

Although AIP is not an Academy program, the San Diego Zoo Global Academy strives to share relevant and interesting articles, programs, and topics about professional development and advanced learning with our readers. Our SDZG colleague Margerie Bergstrom can be reached at mbergstrom@sandiegozoo.org for more information about the Advanced Inquiry Program.