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BUGS brings children to greener pastures

By April Gutierrez | New Mexico Daily Lobo

Last updated: 08/24/11 1:29am

UNM Biology students spent a week with fourth- and fifth-graders in the South Valley this summer, teaching them that science and conservation can be fun.

UNM's Biology Undergraduate Society hosted the Bilingual Junior Scientist Camp on Aug. 1-5, program coordinator and biology student Martha Jo Vargas said.

"The goal for this year's camp was multi-faceted," she said. "We wanted the curriculum and our learning outcomes to clearly show the students ways in which they have the power to actually do something about the environmental issues that are confronting our current generation."

The program focused on sustainability because BUS wanted campers to take what they learned back to their communities, Vargas said.

Sandia National Labs funded the camp: it was free of charge for the 42 student campers who attended it, according to a BUS survey.

Twenty-two UNM students volunteered at the camp.

Vargas said the camp focused on tools for recycling, reusing and reducing the use of natural resources.

The biology department demonstrated these principals when it donated pizza for the campers. Dr. Jose Luis Cruz-Campa, from Sandia National Labs, gave a presentation on solar cells, after which the campers baked cookies in solar ovens made out of the used pizza boxes.

"This activity helped drive the point of sustainability and several of its components, including reducing, reusing and recycling," Vargas said.

Campers were given the opportunity to participate in hands-on experiments, such as strawberry DNA extractions and gingerbread cookie genetics.

Vargas said on the last day of camp, campers helped to plant a tree. She

said this was the highlight of the entire camp experience. Members of Bernalillo Land Management participated in the tree-planting ceremony, in which each camper tossed in a handful of dirt.

“I told them that their contributions to sustainability were similar to that handful of dirt they threw in,” Vargas said. “It was kind of an analogy to our whole planet and how we each have a responsibility ... that each of our contributions may be minute, but combined are elaborate and enormous and sufficient.”

Published August 24, 2011 in News