

Group hosting roundtables to discuss changing deltas

ASU scholars joining top universities with experiment

BY ALDEMARO ROMERO
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Beginning this fall semester, Arkansas State University will start a new experiment in the meeting of the minds. For the first time it will convene roundtable sessions to discuss large issues from many different perspectives.

The first topic to be discussed will be "Deltas of the World," and it will be examined from the humanities, natural and social sciences perspectives.

The ASU faculty members taking part in this roundtable represent a wide spectrum of backgrounds and expertise: Dr. Jennifer L. Bouldin, assistant research professor and director of the ASU Ecotoxicology Research Facility; Dr. Richard Allen Burns, associate professor of English and folklore; Dr. Carolyn Dowling, assistant professor of chemistry; Dr. Erik Gilbert, associate professor of history; Dr. Steven Green, assistant professor of soil and water conservation; Dr. Robyn Hannigan, director of the graduate program in environmental sciences and associate professor of geochemistry; Dr. Gregory Hansen, assistant professor of folklore and

English; Dr. Juliet E. Morrow, survey archaeologist with the Arkansas Archaeological Survey; Dr. Nathan Young, assistant professor of engineering; and the author of this article.

This group of scholars will meet weekly and discuss diverse topics related to deltas including landscape changes in the Mississippi Delta, arsenic in groundwater in the Bengal Basin, mangrove swamps in East Africa, environmental effects of traditional delta farming practices, historical chemical threats within global delta systems, relationships between the folklife of Bangladesh and its delta, climate change in the Central Mississippi Valley and its impact on human settlement and subsistence, environmental history and conservation of aquatic mammals in delta regions, and the interaction of physical and biological processes in river deltas and the effects of river engineering.

Interdisciplinary approaches to global or large issues are now being perceived as the way by which these subjects should be examined. In the past few months many top U.S. universities have started to look at ways on how to approach such issues.

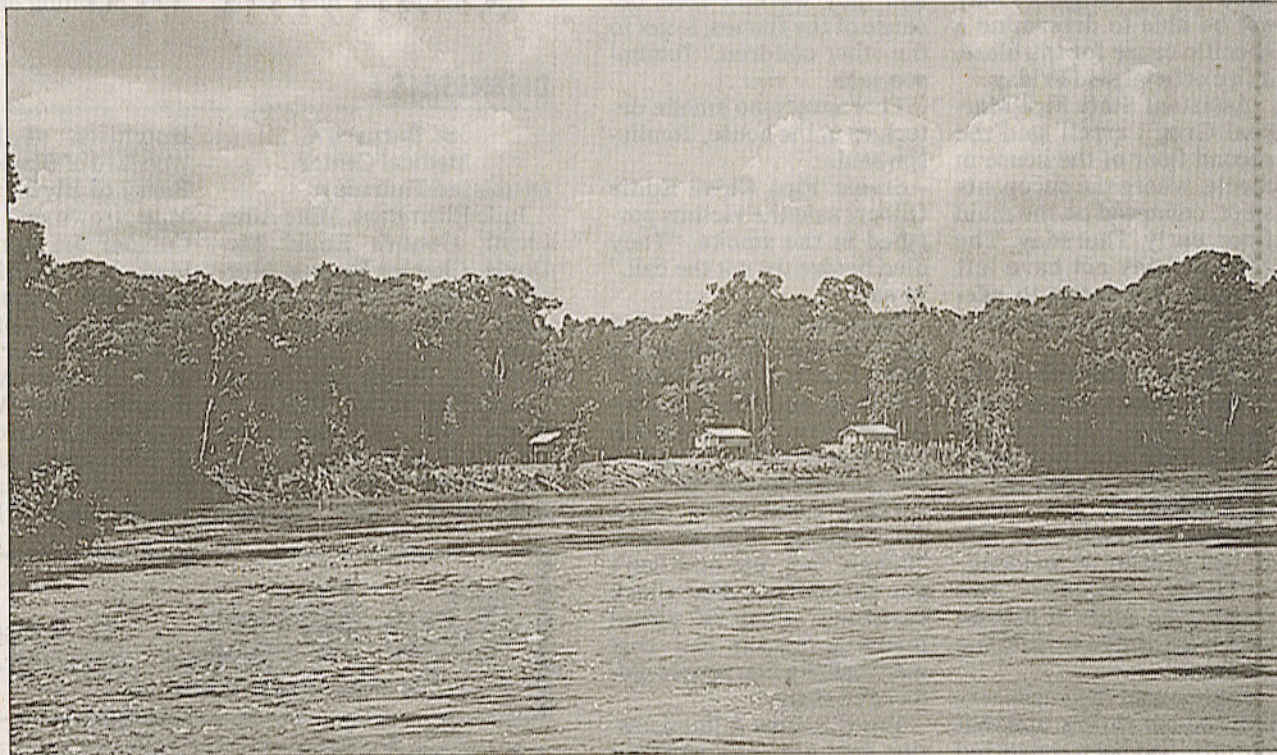


Photo by Aldemaro Romero

A human settlement is visible on the Orinoco River Delta area in Venezuela.

Just two weeks ago Harvard University issued a report on how to help integrate different branches of natural sciences in pursuing common goals. ASU has taken a step further by integrating faculty members from different areas of knowledge that include not only the natural sciences but also the social sciences and the humanities.

One of the difficulties of developing these kinds of initiatives is that sometimes scholars from different areas use terminologies that are un-

familiar to scholars of other areas. By having face-to-face discussions, this difficulty can be overcome.

One of the advantages of carrying out these discussions is to discover that many of the problems examined are the result of interactions among natural and social factors and that the solution to those problems also require approaches that are interdisciplinary in nature.

The results of these discussions will be published on the Internet in order to make them available to

everybody around the world.

With this ASU establishes itself at the forefront of universities when it comes to innovative approaches of discussing and proposing solutions to global issues.

For questions contact the Department of Biological Sciences at biology@astate.edu.

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