



“OUR GOAL WAS TO  
MAKE A SMALLER  
HOME WITHIN THIS  
LARGE CAMPUS.”

# Living GLOBALLY: 30 Students, One World

For freshmen (l-r) Angelica Kalika, Rachel Lem, and Jennifer Millman, along with about 30 other students, Cal's environmentally themed dorm provides community, close faculty contact, and memories that will last a lifetime.

By Catherine Price

**S**uk-Ann Yee, a junior majoring in Environmental Science, is an excellent shot. On the wall of her room hangs a poster of a grizzly bear with the outline of a heart-shaped target traced in pink on its chest. It's been punctured by large, rough-edged holes.

“Those are from a shotgun,” Yee giggles, pointing out several additional, less deadly hits.

Yee is the residential program adviser for the Global Environment Theme Program (GETH), a dorm that's both a home and a living classroom for 30 undergraduates. Luckily for the students under her watch, Yee's sharp-shooting skills are getting rusty. The poster is a souvenir from her summer job working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska, where she learned to shoot—just in case she had to defend herself from angry animals. The job included banding geese, studying frog deformities to measure water quality, and living in a



field camp with no running water. Now Yee is back at school, where the challenges of living in a tent have been replaced with the responsibility of mentoring underclassmen.

A co-ed dormitory located in the Foothill residence complex just north of campus, GETH was created for students interested in exploring social, economic, and scientific issues of the environment in their daily lives. As in most dorms, students live two or three to a room, share a common living area, and often eat together in the dining hall. But the students here are also a specialized bunch. In 17-year-old Lia Marshall's room, for instance, Bjork and *Fight Club* posters share wall space with a crowd of Sierra Club photographs, and a recycling bin sits prominently next to her desk. After a summer break spent doing environmental work in Costa Rica, she says she's happy to live where "the environment is a unifying theme." In fact, Marshall says GETH "was one of my motivations for coming to Cal." Now she's contemplating a double major in Conservation and Resource Studies and Public Health, and hopes for a career



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## “PEOPLE ARE MAKING

says. “Our goal was to make a smaller home within this large campus.” He coordinated logistics with Troy Gilbert at the campus residential services office and a core group of involved CNR faculty (John Battles, Peter Berck, George Chang, Kate O’Neill, and Stephen Welter). The theme house opened in 2003 with 20 residents. That number rose to just over 30 this year, and the GETH advisory board plans to increase the capacity to 44 students next year.

To help make this growing community more cohesive, Suk-Ann Yee recently organized a camping retreat for residents. “I forced everyone to spend the night sleeping in tents,” she says. It seems such efforts are successful—GETH students who decide to move off campus often do so with friends they’ve met through the program. As Yee puts it, “People are making a community on-campus and off.”

Another prime benefit for GETH students is the opportunity to meet and interact with professors outside of the classroom. For instance, every week GETH students gather just down the stairs from their rooms to hear faculty and other guests talk about issues like environmental economics and atmospheric chemistry. Afterwards, teachers and students have dinner together. “It’s nice,” Yee says. “The professors like to know what’s going on in students’ lives.”

For students, the rewards of making such connections are tangible—from getting letters of recommendation to receiving academic advice and occasionally even job leads. Most importantly, residents have an excellent opportunity to build student-mentor relationships. “Allen has been there to listen when I’m upset,” says Yee. “And John has encouraged me to apply for scholarships. I probably wouldn’t have done it without him. I probably would have given up.”



Resident assistant Suk-Ann Yee has been watching out for GETH underclassmen since the program’s inception last year.

that combines environmental work with international relations.

Down the hall, freshman Marcus Gabriel says that “the coolest thing is to find people who have the same passions and interests that I do. It’s great to find people who are even more into recycling than I am.”

GETH is the brainchild of Allen Goldstein, associate professor of biogeochemistry. Goldstein came up with the theme house idea while pondering ways to provide CNR students with an extraordinary undergraduate experience. “We wanted to break down the barriers that often exist between faculty and freshmen,” Goldstein

## A COMMUNITY ON-CAMPUS AND OFF.”

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Despite all of this, it may be the field trips that do the most to make GETH so extraordinary. On recent excursions, the students visited Point Reyes National Seashore to study fault lines, endangered grasses, and Tule elk restoration; toured the fledgling University of California campus at Merced to survey environmental compliance; and visited the Central Valley to see salmon spawn. John Battles, an associate professor of forest ecology, has even taken students kayaking off of Monterey Bay, in the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, to study pesticide runoff.

“Elkhorn Slough is a stunning place with an incredible availability of marine wildlife,” says Battles, who coordinated all of the trip’s logistics, including recruiting experienced guides to make sure that no one went overboard. Students and teachers spent four hours paddling down the slough, where they were approached by curious seals, otters, and pelicans. And of course, there was the kayaking. “By the end of the day we were doing races,” Battles says.

Providing such close, personal experiences with the environment was part of the original vision for the theme house. “We wanted to do something really notable, fun, and different,” Battles says. “As a teacher it’s great because you can point to what you’re studying instead of just showing slides. And it helps keep a balance by doing things that are both fun and informative.”

Out of six residential theme houses at Berkeley, GETH is the only one sponsored by an academic unit. “I think it’s a real testament to CNR’s commitment to undergraduate education and faculty-student interaction,” says Troy Gilbert. “It’s a great example of the kind of things we can do at Berkeley. Despite the fact that

it’s a great research university, many faculty members are truly committed to the quality of the undergraduate experience.” 🚩

—Catherine Price is a freelance journalist and founding editor of Salt Magazine ([www.saltmag.net](http://www.saltmag.net)).

Residents of GETH have many opportunities to get their hands wet in the field, from witnessing salmon spawn (above) to accessing study sites by kayak (right).



The Global Environment Theme House receives support from the Berkeley Fund for Natural Resources. In addition, the faculty involved with GETH have used all the discretionary funding they are awarded for teaching freshman and sophomore seminars to maintain GETH activities. To support GETH and other undergraduate programs through the Berkeley Fund for Natural Resources, call Matt Fratus at (510) 643-1041.