

## Collaborations with Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

### JACK PUTZ & CLAUDIA ROMERO

Claudia and Jack spent most of July to August 2009 as visiting professors in the Department of Environmental Science at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. While they were teaching and interacting with researchers, their 11-year-old son, Antonio, attended Graeme College where, instead of playing soccer and goofing around, he ended up studying Xhosa and playing wing for the school's rugby team.

Encouragement to apply for the visiting professorship regularly offered by Rhodes University came from research collaborations with Sheona Shackleton and James Gambiza that she established 10 years ago when the couple spent a sabbatical year in Zimbabwe. During their recent stay in Grahamstown, their network of research partners was expanded by their frequent interactions with other faculty and students in Environmental Science and other departments including Botany, Environmental Education, Geography, and Economics. Claudia coordinated a Journal Club discussion with Honors and graduate students on the topic of evaluation of conservation projects. Jack's interactions with honor students in Botany and his public lectures focused on the ecological/social/economic tradeoffs inherent in conservation interventions. They found both the university (6000 students) and Grahamstown as a whole (population 125,000) to be extremely accessible and friendly.

Most of Claudia and Jack's activities centered on the topic of global climate change as it relates to South Africa, especially the spectacular Eastern Cape Province. One module they ran with Environmental Science students was a prototype of the "Carbon Clinic" on which they have been working for the past year. Although neither Claudia nor Jack have much experience in semi-arid ecosystems and were entirely new to South Africa, their hosts appreciated



their insights and curiosity. Of particular interest in the Eastern Cape region is the fate of "thicket", a nearly impenetrable endemic ecosystem dominated by succulent trees and spinescent lianas except where decimated by wild elephants or domestic goats. Their visit culminated with two keynote presentations at the Thicket Forum, a regional meeting of researchers, property managers, and governmental officials concerned about thicket conservation and restoration.

Although the visit of the Romero-Putz family was relatively short, they were in residence long enough to build some strong ties and fully expect

to continue working in the region. Claudia and Jack already serve on several M.S. and Ph.D. committees and are writing a policy brief on climate change mitigation options for a series published by the Department of Environmental Science. Reciprocal visits to UF by Rhodes faculty and students are already planned and a formal exchange agreement is in the works.

*Claudia Romero and Francis E. "Jack" Putz are courtesy professor of biology and professor of biology, respectively, as well as affiliates of the Center for African Studies at the University of Florida.*