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Students to present findings from research trip to Costa Rica, Panama

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Students on Turrialba volcano during study abroad expedition to Costa Rica

ST. PETERSBURG, FL (June 18, 2012) – A dozen biology and environmental science students who returned recently from a three-week study-abroad expedition to Costa Rica and Panama will present their findings Thursday during a two-hour session at Coquina Club.

The expedition was part of the six-credit course, “Biogeography of the Panama Gap,” offered through the Biology Department and co-directed by Iuri Herzfeld, Ph.D., and Heather Judkins, Ph.D., who accompanied the students on the trip. The course explored soil-plant relationships along the aging Central American Volcanic Arc landscape. Students visited and sampled young volcanic landscapes, old-growth rain forest, and coral reefs.

The closure of the Panama Gap — the space between North and South America before the Isthmus of Panama was formed — resulted from active tectonic activity among four plates (Cocos, Nazca, Caribbean, and South American plates). The closure of the Gap prompted large migrations between North and South American species and the formation of a barrier between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. The result: a region considered a hotspot for global biodiversity.

The students involved in the expedition were Aaron Burnham, Lena Wray, Erin Walters, J.J. Kimmel, Kris Nayak, Rachael Moran, Brittany Copeland, Rob Cuba, Rob Collins, Karleigh Chase, Kelly O’Connell, and Jamison Tarter. All got a full taste of field research while residing

at stations managed by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama and the Organization for Tropical Studies in Costa Rica.

Besides their research projects, the student blogged about their experiences, outlining the science and culture of the day and fielding questions from the general public.

The six student projects will be presented from 10 a.m. to noon on Thursday June 21st at Coquina Club (next to Coquina Hall RM 101). The public is invited.