Q: We talk a lot about the importance of being a “global citizen” at EPI. What does that concept mean to you personally?
A: Being a global citizen means you’re aware of your actions on a daily basis. It means you consciously give consideration to how your actions affect not only your local environment and community but the wider global community and the global systems that we’re all connected to.

Q: Why did you and Julie set out to focus on the “next generation”?
A: I love working with teens! There’s an innocence and high capacity that are blended with this emerging sense of possibility. When you’re a teen (or even an adult!), you may not know exactly who you are or what you want, but you have this strong energy and an emerging sense of self and capacity. It’s a space I love to be a part of.

Q: Besides science skills, which are an intrinsic part of our courses, what skills do you feel students learn in a typical EPI course?
A: Students learn an awareness of themselves and what they are capable of. For example, maybe they don’t get the best grades, but with EPI they gain an awareness that they’re good leaders, because they help other students. Maybe they find hidden strengths, and this different learning environment helps illuminate them. Then they go home and engage their strengths in different ways in their own communities.

Q: EPI believes there’s a strong connection between cultural exchange and conservation. How do you believe one impacts the other?
A: Cultural exchange and meeting people from other countries make the global nature of our daily lives more real. So, I might see a sticker on a banana that says “Ecuador” and not think anything of it. But if I’ve been to Ecuador and seen a banana plantation and met people who worked there, it changes my relationship with that banana! And maybe it changes where I buy that banana from, if I buy organic, or if I buy it at all. That awareness of our decisions and how they impact people from other places is huge. Having a cultural exchange experience in your lifetime makes that more real and gives you a greater awareness of why these things are important to everyone.

Q: What advice can you give for people feeling overwhelmed by the global environmental issues we’re facing today?
A: Thinking about issues on a planetary scale can get depressing and difficult. But I think a lot of the issues we’re facing come down to a lack of connection to (and awareness of) self, others, and nature. Reconnecting in these three fundamental ways is a fairly simple, straightforward, and intuitive solution to the massive global problems that none of us can solve by ourselves. The focus of EPI’s efforts is this collective action that leads to systemic, durable, and real change. It all starts with you and how you connect with the world - through yourself, others, and nature.
UNDERSTANDING TOP ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS

A sustainable future for our planet depends on the next generation understanding the most critical threats to our environment — like pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. As a small, coastal country dependent on natural resources, with a large portion of the population living on the coastline, Belize is particularly vulnerable to climate change. In partnership with the Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project, EPI students are digging deeper into this challenge through new curriculum focused on climate change causes, impacts, mitigation, and adaptation strategies to help protect their local communities.

BECOMING GLOBAL CITIZENS

The path to global citizenship begins with a personal connection to different people, places, and cultures. Throughout the program season, we see high school students connecting with their international peers and expanding their world views. They learn to recognize what makes them similar and embrace what sets them apart.

At EPI, we're lucky to witness this transformation from the individual to the global — to see young people become part of a larger community and begin to take on the incredible responsibility of personally contributing to a better world for everyone.

For example, in Galapagos, EPI students from the U.S. connect with their Galapageño peers from the Mola Mola Eco-Club. Eco-Club members take the U.S. students to visit Tortuga Bay, where they participate in a sea turtle conservation project. The students have lunch, play games, share experiences, and develop a deeper understanding of another culture.

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

The scientific process is used to answer questions by making an observation, coming up with a theory, and then using facts to support a conclusion. It's a central part of EPI’s science-based curriculum, and a methodology that proves useful for much more than just scientific research.

Between social media influences, conflicting news sources, and tricky advertising strategies, today’s generation needs critical thinking skills to evaluate the flood of information to which we are all exposed. A true leader challenges what they see, asks questions, and looks for proof — whether in the lab or online, and we’re proud to call these leaders EPI alums!

MENTORING THE NEXT GENERATION

Sebali Eco-Club members in Costa Rica are getting a chance to put the leadership skills they learned on course to the test. Along with their peers from area schools, they participated in “Eco-Campa,” a two-day workshop and planning session to develop conservation projects and learn the fundraising, communication, and organizational skills they need to successfully carry them out. Participants included both alumni and local youth who are new to EPI, and several workshops were conducted by one of the Eco-Club’s founding members, Stif.

My EPI experience taught me that a critical thinker looks beyond what she sees for a deeper understanding of what is happening in the world.

— Claire, Yellowstone Alumna

Greener, Brighter: HOW THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS IS SHAPING OUR FUTURE
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