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An Uncommon Undergraduate Experience: Conducting Research and Fieldwork in Ecological Restoration

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The Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) at Northern Arizona University offers a formal program to encourage undergraduate students to integrate research and educational activities. In the past three years, 55 undergraduates representing 18 majors have been financially supported to participate in ecological research and practical work experience. Students selected and awarded assistantships work as year-round researchers in campus laboratories and as summer field crew assistants at research sites across the Colorado Plateau. In addition to their employment, students are required to take FOR 380 Ecological Restoration Principles and FOR 382 Ecological Restoration Applications to better understand the context of their work. Before graduating, students complete a senior project that consists of either an independent research project or an internship with an agency committed to forest restoration. Every year the Institute has proudly sponsored seniors to present their research at professional conferences and symposiums. ERI alumni have been well prepared for entry level careers in ecology or graduate studies. A strong interdisciplinary approach invites freshmen and sophomores from all majors to apply, thus contributing to the university’s recruitment and retention efforts. This unique campus program targets underclassmen and minorities and provides specialized mentoring thanks to a diverse team of faculty, staff, and graduate students.

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