

T H E F A R M S E M E S T E R

What started as a concept is now going into its second year. The Farm Semester launched last spring with a handful of dedicated adventurers. We think the best description of what this project-oriented progressive education experience is all about is the one printed in this year's course catalog. So here it is.

The Farm Semester is a capstone course for the Putney student, culminating in an exhibition scale research project. The course utilizes three agricultural industries critical to New England's social, political, economic, and ecological development: dairying, sugaring, and logging. In each of these units students are presented with a series of topics and questions in the form of lectures and field trips. Lectures provide a basis for grasping key language and concepts associated with each industry. Students are then allowed to choose a topic or question for each industry that they spend a week researching and subsequently present to the class.

Students also have the option of combining fiber arts with the farm semester. Projects and assignments can revolve around the school's prize-winning flock of Border Leicester, Romney and Merino sheep. Components of the course can include studying flock management and the history of sheep farming in New England, interviewing local mill owners, visiting textile museums, planting a natural dye garden, as well as spinning, dyeing and weaving with the wool produced on the farm.

The goal of the course is to give students the tools to design and carry out their own significant research that will be practical and/or publishable. Just as students who help paint the barn provide a lasting impact on the school, this course is meant to allow students a chance to not only further their own knowledge of agriculture but also provide critical research and information for the broader Putney community.

Agriculture is an inherently interdisciplinary endeavor, necessarily entwining man and nature in critical ways. As a result, this course makes little attempt to separate and distinguish the science of agriculture from the history of agriculture and students are expected to reflect on the connections between the two. For example, the science of dairying is intimately connected with social, political, and economic changes and constraints.

Finally, the course is an attempt to provide students with a greater appreciation for the hills and valleys surrounding the school, grasping ways in which the landscape has shaped this region's agriculture and ways in which agriculture has, in turn, changed the landscape. In this sense, the course provides an opportunity to envision a past, present, and future, connecting students to the people and landscape that surround them at Putney.

This course is open to seniors only. Credit will be given for one semester of lab science, one semester of history and two days of afternoon activities for one term. Students who take six-day sports in the spring semester will not be able to take advantage of this course. Seniors should be aware if they are interested in doing a senior exhibition, that they must drop neither or both. Of course in order to take advantage of the course, it is encouraged that students make the commitment to the full semester, particularly since there is an exhibition component built into the course.

Sound exciting? Rumor has it that this is just the prototype for other semester intensives to come. Please address any questions or comments to Judith Sheridan, or e-mail them to jsheridan@putneyschool.org. 🐾

In other farm news, students Nicole Ritchie '05, Coral Kent-Dennis '05, Daphne Braden '05 and alumna Claudia Peknik '02 coached Mavis to her second consecutive grand championship at the Cheshire Fair last July in Keene, NH. As you can see, all were deeply moo-oo-ved by this accomplishment.

