



ALAMO
COLLEGES

NORTHWEST VISTA COLLEGE

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For Immediate Release

NVC Signs Agreement for EcoLab Field School

Northwest Vista College is one of few colleges giving students graduate-level research opportunities

San Antonio, TX - In less than two years' time, Northwest Vista College has added its second field school for students to do graduate-level research. Most community college students have to wait until they are juniors or seniors at four-year colleges before they can get their hands-on real-world experience.

This second field school, also known as the NVC EcoLab, will take place on 28.23 acres, located off Hwy 16 outside the city of Bandera. It will allow students and faculty to investigate and analyze local ecosystems.

Dr. Scott Walker, who has traveled to Morocco with NVC students for a study-abroad field school program, said the goal is to build a robust Adventure Science research program so students can gain first-hand experience if they were to transfer to similar programs at four-year schools. He said having access to about 30 acres of a diverse Hill Country ecosystem will give NVC students the opportunity to "do" environmental science, not just study "about" it.

"I want our students to go into UTSA's programs with real research experience, for majors and non-majors alike," said Walker, who is coordinator of NVC's Geography and Environmental Sustainability program. "Few, if any, community colleges have field study programs. This puts us in line with the four-year universities - the ones with field schools."

Walker said he hopes to have the first face-to-face class this fall (pending COVID-19 restrictions), to give NVC students another opportunity to study "wild" habitat beyond the campus and if they are unable to travel to Morocco. He added the new EcoLab will be interdisciplinary since it could be used by a botany class, a geology class, or by students doing extracurricular research with a faculty member.

In January 2019, NVC also signed an agreement with owners of an Alamo River RV Resort to allow students to use a portion of the land in Von Army in South San Antonio for an archaeological dig on the property. That spot along the Medina River is rich with colonial and historical context with some artifacts found to date back to the Clovis Period (prehistoric) as well as early to mid 19th and 20th centuries.

This current agreement was signed on April 20 (within two days of NVC's 25th birthday). The property for the EcoLab is located at 5706 HWY 16 S TX, in Bandera, and is owned by Gregory R. Runnels and Shellie A. Runnels, who became the property's new owners in February of this year.

NVC President Dr. Ric Baser said with this new addition, Northwest Vista may be the only community college in the nation to have two field research schools in the U.S, and one in Morocco.

“The excitement voiced by my best science faculty made this a priority for me to champion,” added Baser. “Because we are a community college who believes in the power of undergraduate research leading to STEM graduates, our students will have an advantage over other undergraduates.”

About Northwest Vista College: Alamo Colleges - Northwest Vista College opened in 1995 with 12 students and is currently the third largest college in San Antonio in terms of enrollment. Located in Westover Hills, Northwest Vista College celebrating its 25th anniversary this year.