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Managing Director of the Jamaican Water Resources Authority Basil Fernandez (left) discusses the day's route with Crawford Hydrology Laboratory manager Priscilla Baker, Chairman of the Jamaican Water Resources Authority Parris Lyew-Ayee Jr., and director of the Hoffman Environmental Research Institute at Western, Dr. Chris Groves. Groves and his team from Western traveled to Jamaica this past weekend to aid the Jamaican government in understanding their water resources and establish a relationship between the Jamaican Government and Western's Hoffman Institute.

Jamaica trip provides chance to learn

By: Cole Claybourn

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Western may be creating a long-term relationship with Jamaica.

Last weekend, Western faculty and students traveled there to help the country learn how to protect its water resources, and are planning to go back.

Faculty and students from Western's department of geography and geology, the School of Journalism and Broadcasting, and the Hoffman Environmental Research Institute went on the trip, according to a Western press release.

The Jamaican Water Resources Authority, the organization that's responsible for all water resources in Jamaica, contacted Western in November, said Chris Groves, a geography professor who went on the trip.

The WRA contacted Western specifically because Western has a dye tracing lab, said Pat Kambesis of the Hoffman Institute.

Louisville senior Dalene Smith, a geology major, who went on the trip, said dye tracing is a process where colored dye is inserted in to a stream or well, and is picked up downstream by charcoal receptors to measure which way the water flows.

She said the group assessed possible water contamination by helping the WRA trace for contaminants.

Smith said the group's goal is to send more teams to teach the WRA how to conduct dye tracing and help them set up study labs.

Groves said the WRA e-mailed the Hoffman Institute after seeing its Web site.

"A lot of their questions required someone to show them how to do something," he said. "So, we saw this as an opportunity to get a team together of faculty and students and take a trip to educate the Jamaican people on this particular subject."

Jamaica has a karst landscape, which is similar to south central Kentucky, Groves said.

He said karst landscapes are areas where rocks are very soluble and the ground contains a lot of caves and sink holes.

"The water goes down into those spaces, rather than staying on the surface," he said. "That's when the water quality becomes a problem."

Groves said Jamaica and other poor countries don't have money to fix water problems, which is why they sought Western's help.

James Kenney, coordinator of the photojournalism program, Daniel Houghton, a junior photojournalism major, from Fayetteville, Ga., were also on the trip to document the work, according to the press release.

Groves said the two will make a video for Jamaican public television that will educate Jamaicans about water issues in their country.

Kenney said the project was a good way for faculty and students from different departments to work together and promote change in a different country.

Similar trips are being planned, Groves said.

"We're in contact with 55 different countries that have these particular problems with their water," he said.

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