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Teens team up to clean up

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Special to The Sun

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Brittany Bruce never imagined she would be picking up someone else's trash

on a Saturday morning. But here she was, covered in mud, on a 93-degree day

that would normally be spent at the beach with her friends.

"Coming from Miami Beach, where everything is money and celebrities, and

now I'm here on a Saturday working at a creek. I never in a million years

thought I would be here," said Bruce, 17.

About 120 high school students from across Florida helped to remove trash

and built-up debris from six Gainesville area creeks Saturday. The students

are participants in the Student Science Training Program and the UF Young Entrepreneurs program that teamed up with Current Problems Inc.

The students are living on the UF campus for about six weeks doing scientific research and learning business practices, according to Dr. Mary

Jo Koroly, director of the UF Center for Precollegiate Education and



DOUG FINGER/The Gainesville Sun
Katrina Cuddy, 19, a counselor with the University of Florida Student Science Training Program, at far left, cleans Rosewood Creek alongside Varun Channagiri, 17, of Tampa Prep High School, center, and Aarthi Ram, 16, of Lacanto High School Saturday, July 19, 2008. High school students from around the country, who took part in UF's Student Science Training Program and the UF Young Entrepreneurs for Leadership and Change, removed litter and debris from Rosewood Creek and Sweetwater Branch in conjunction with Current Problems Inc., an environmental group here in Gainesville.

Training.

This summer marks the 50th anniversary for the Student Science Training Program, which had 95 high schoolers cleaning up creeks on Saturday, Koroly said. It was the second year for the UF Young Entrepreneurs for Leadership and Change, which had about 23 high school students involved. Koroly said the program wants to make sure the students are taught breadth as well as depth.

"Science is wonderful, but sometimes you can get so immersed in it that you don't realize there is a world going on around you," Koroly said. Cleaning the creeks, she said, helps teach the young people how important it is to give back to their community. During their six weeks in Gainesville, the students work about 60 hours per week and only have one day completely to themselves — and that day is usually spent studying, Koroly said.

The students work closely with faculty members and graduate students conducting experiments in fields such as autoimmunity, stem-cell research and artificial intelligence.

"They're immersed in professionalism before they're in college," Koroly said. "It changes their lives."

Alexa Marrese, 17, is one of the students who helped collect about 450 pounds of trash from Rosewood Creek. She said they found lots of glass bottles, two tires, even a rusted refrigerator door. "I just can't believe people would throw that stuff in our drinking water," Marrese said.

Marrese said that when you are down in the creek picking up the trash, it really opens your eyes to the problem of polluting what could eventually be

our drinking water. She said the collaboration of the groups helped provide the manpower needed for the cleanup.

"It wouldn't have been possible if we all weren't working together," Marrese said.

Bruce, the student from Miami Beach, is with the UF Young Entrepreneurs for Leadership and Change, and she said the program has them doing a community service project every Saturday. The first week she said she was not happy at all about doing the work. Since then, she said her attitude has changed.

"From poverty to pollution, there's just so much we can do to help," she said. "This is just a small piece of it."

Bruce said she has now decided to plan a trip to Africa next summer to do service projects. She said that if enough people are willing to give their time and efforts, then great things could be accomplished.
