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IWU Senior Takes Agri-Environmental Knowledge to Peace Corps

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.—Luke Durbin, a senior biology and environmental studies major from the Bloomington area, has enjoyed an undergraduate career of remarkable ambition and future benefit for a large cause. Durbin aspires to help solve some of the problems of the effect of agriculture on the environment .

Upon his graduation from Illinois Wesleyan this May, Durbin plans to enter the Peace Corps, into which he has already been accepted. He has also been assigned to his region of choice: French West Africa. His preference for West Africa was determined by a few factors. Sub-Saharan Africa has plenty of environmental problems, meaning it is the ideal place for Durbin to learn more about agriculture's degradation of the land as well as the place where his help is most needed. His desire to go to a developing country is fueled by his interest in educating the local populations on agricultural sustainability.

Having grown up on a farm just outside of Bloomington-Normal, Durbin was exposed to agriculture and environment at an early age. When he decided to enroll at Illinois Wesleyan, Durbin selected biology as his major, but under the guidance of Given Harper, professor and chair of biology and associate director of environmental studies, and Abigail Jahiel, associate professor of environmental studies and international studies, he soon added environmental studies as a second major.

As his interests developed and intensified, Durbin began to seek outside experiences in addition to his studies at the University. He spent the summer of 2003, just after his sophomore year, doing field work and data analysis at Harvard University. Harvard's program in Research for Undergraduates allowed Durbin to expand his knowledge of the environment in Harvard Forest, wooded land owned by the university. The research was designed to better understand invasive species in the forest and their effect on bio-diversity.

The following fall, Durbin embarked for a year's study in the United Kingdom. Admitted into Illinois Wesleyan's joint program with Oxford-Pembroke, Durbin had the opportunity to work at the Environmental Change Institute of Oxford University. There, he studied the effectiveness of the European