Professor Wang and Dupuis were in South Africa investigating the possibility of a long-term service learning programme that would be based at the Swinburne Sustainability Center and Conservancy (SSCC) which is on a farm in the Harrismith area. The SSCC was founded by a group of stakeholders from all over the world immediately following the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit. Wits University had already been using the farm for a number of years for practical studies in environmental management. Over the years, students and researchers from various continents have visited the center. The center is situated on an important wetland, with its related special fauna and flora, and one of only two remaining English blockhouses from the Anglo-Boer War, which is located at the center. UCF plans to start excavation of iron age villages at the site as part of its student programme.

"The importance of partnerships in environmental management and sustainability is long-term involvement," says Annamarei Versveld, lawyer and scientist, and founder member of the SSCCC.

First phase involvement by UCF students will be a due diligence of needs in the area and to partner with local educational structures, civic groups, and the private sector in developing a programme which will work closely with local communities to determine their needs, and then in partnership with local and other international groups to develop programmes, over time, which will strengthen local communities, whilst developing the practical skills set of UCF students.

Annamarei Versveld studied at the University of the Witwatersrand’s Rural Faculty (WRF) as part of her MSC thesis and believes the UCF involvement can be an important contribution to making the Free State and Natal Midlands area an example of collaboration and outreach to strengthen local rural communities in some of the hardest hit poverty areas in South Africa. Media 24 became interested in Veroord’s work in poverty nodes when she visited various towns along the N3 in 2011 on the invitation of the N3TC to investigate the possibility of partnering the SSCC to assist towns and villages adjacent to the N3 to become sustainable tourism destinations for international and local tourists and school groups. The proposed theme for this project is a celebration of the South African constitutional democracy and the initiative to achieve peaceful solutions to global problems. Many countries use historical figures, such as George Washington in the case of the USA, to emphasise the principles of equality, justice, freedom and peace. "The rich history adjacent to the N3 route and the worldwide interest in South Africa forging peaceful solutions despite apartheid, make the towns along the N3 excellent locations for a Peace Parkway, where the principles of democracy advocated by heroes such as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, who lived out a portion of their personal histories along the route, can be celebrated," comments Charmaine Upton of Media 24.

In the longer term, UCF may become interested in being involved with the Peace Parkway, but at present their focus is on setting up their programme for students to environmental management and sustainability studies. Dr. Dotsu Geonghio of the University of Johannesburg (UJ) arranged for Wang and Dupuis to meet the Head of the Department of Politics, Prof. Chris Landsberg, and a number of other UJ faculty members and students. In Pretoria, they met Prof. John Mugabe from the University of Pretoria and a delegation from Kenya. Prof. James Lekoma from the Monash University (Australia), South Africa Campus, offered them a tour of the Monash facility on their next visit.

Barnett Honors College has developed a sustainability programme in St. Kitts and Nevis where they focus on engineering and sustainable agriculture, public health, oral history and environmental management. Due to low rainfall at the UCF sites in St. Kitts and Nevis, the university is developing farming methods which require minimal water use. The South African programme is likely to build on the existing project but will be adapted to suit South African needs and conditions.

Likely initial focus areas will include a cheetah research programme in conjunction with Namibian Game Reserve which is a Big 5 reserve less than half an hour’s drive from the N3 toll gate at Lambirth and partnerships with projects in the Phaladi-Jabba and Ekiken regions.

Professor Wang described the highlights of his trip as the meetings with the Basotho Queen, Motsokoane Mopeli, and author Devi Moodley Rajab, whose book ‘Women, South Africans of Indian Origin’ celebrates the strength of women often under adverse circumstances, and seeing the incredible work done by Reverend Mbele whose small church reaches out to serve meals to 170 Aids orphans at Nalabang in Harrismith five times a week.

"Sustainability in action is when partnerships are formed between government, commercial, academic and social structures to choose and pursue the common good above self-interest and to create a synergism of positive outcomes for people at local level, which no group could achieve on its own."

"Media 24 remains committed to the process of upliftment of all South Africans through its social responsibility initiatives and looks forward to working with local and international partners in this process," concludes Upton.

1. Dr Alwin Wang visiting the Cheetah project at the Namibian Conservancy and Game Reserve.
3. A girl in front of her traditional village home. The Barnett Honors College service learning project will be to collect and document oral histories of cultural traditions.
4. Martin Dupuis handing out UCF pencils to orphans at the Masimzhi Community Center.
5. An audience with Queen Motsokoane Mopeli of the Basotho where Martin Dupuis and Alwin Wang discussed a royal project designed to celebrate and record the cultural traditions of the Basotho.
6. Professors Alvin Wang and Martin Dupuis and Principal Josiah Motsung of the Swinburne Elementary School.