

Geographically separated, virtually connected: co-teaching across the state utilizing Zoom

The Covid-19 pandemic brought many changes to Extension programming delivery, largely, the transition into virtual platforms. Utilization of these technologies allowed for safe participation. The Florida Sea Grant agents in Okaloosa and Miami-Dade counties and Okaloosa County Commercial Horticulture agent collaborated and offered an entirely virtual module of the Florida Master Naturalist Program (FMNP), which historically had only been offered in person. Objectives: Offer an FMNP module delivered entirely via Zoom and make the experience as engaging as possible without the in-person component. Methods: Three UF/IFAS Extension Agents planned and delivered the course. In addition to the required lectures and videos, they coordinated guest speakers, planned other in-class activities and developed guidelines for self-guided field trips and report-out sessions. Results: 20 students participated in the June/July 2021 Freshwater Systems course. Pre and post test scores indicated a knowledge gain of 18%. 18/20 students completed the post-course evaluations, with 10 rating the course as “Excellent”, 5 “Very Good”, and 3 “Good”. Open-ended responses reflected the overall high level of satisfaction with the course. Follow-up surveys documented further impacts including volunteer time, information shared with others, working for an organization that promotes advocacy based on science, and more. Conclusions: Virtual platforms allow expanded collaborations between agents, across disciplines and physical location. Carefully planned activities successfully build relationships across a virtual space and enhance the learning experience. Zoom provided a unique opportunity for three agents, geographically distanced by 630 miles to teach together.



Ana Zangroniz

Ana Zangroniz serves as the Florida Sea Grant Extension Agent in Miami-Dade County, FL. Ana’s focus is on the coastal and marine resources of Miami-Dade County, and she delivers extension programming that is audience-specific and addresses the needs of both the environment and local stakeholders. Ana’s major program areas include: promoting healthy habitats and ecosystems, and improving marine and environmental literacy and stewardship. Ana works most frequently with fishermen, the boating community, scuba divers, and natural resource managers.

Laura Tiu

Dr. Tiu is a Marine Science Extension Agent with the University of Florida Sea Grant. Her areas of expertise include technology transfer, industry development and environmental education. She is working in Okaloosa and Walton counties on a variety of projects. Her signature project is the development of an Aquaponics Community of Practice, a group of individuals learning together in the Panhandle. She is also working on a micro-plastic awareness project, a barotrauma research effort with the Destin Charter Boat captains and a series of environmental awareness eco-tours with the Panhandle Outdoor Live groups.

Sheila Dunning

Sheila Dunning is the Commercial Horticulture Agent with the University of Florida Extension Service in Okaloosa County. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Horticulture and a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Education and Communication from the University of Florida, as well as, several industry certifications including International Society of Agriculture Arborist, Associate Certified Entomologist, and Florida Nursery Growers and Landscape Association Landscape Contractor. Her background is in the nursery industry, of which she was employed for twenty-two years before joining Extension over eighteen years ago.