

Taryn Fielder

▼ Eckerd College ▼ 4.0 GPA

▼ Senior in Political Science & International Relations

In Taryn Fielder's case, someone must have told her she could never be active in 25 groups at once, gain acceptance to Duke, Berkeley, and NYU law schools, or earn the most number-one votes of any Florida College Student of the Year winner. "I enjoy people telling me something's not possible and proving them wrong," says Fielder, the first-ever finalist from Eckerd. "Not so much to say, 'I told you so,' but to know that I overcame obstacles."

Florida Leader magazine, First Union National Bank of Florida, Publix Super Markets, and a national panel of judges are proud to recognize Taryn Fielder, a senior in political science and international relations at Eckerd College, as the 1999 Florida College Student of the Year.

One of 32 residential advisors, Fielder plans programs for 30 on-campus students. "Out of all the activities I've done this year, being an RA is the most exciting," says Fielder, 21, who has organized museum trips, a barbecue, and croquet matches for residents. "There's a lot of camaraderie among our staff. It really has to be a shared ideology for us to be effective."

On the Student Court, Fielder is one of two senior advocates who helps student defendants understand their rights. She also is a student representative on the Tampa Bay Committee on Foreign Relations, chairperson for Model United Nations, and a staff member of the Triton campus newspaper and Hullabaloo yearbook. For two years, Fielder has coordinated a weekend Leadership Conference, which she created. In 1998, she also served as interim coordinator of Eckerd's new student orientation, which spans three weeks. As special student assistant to the college president, Fielder organizes research, long-term planning, and events such as a student-faculty trip to Adventure Island. In addition, as director of communications for Student Government, Fielder oversees all student media, including the radio station, literary magazine, and television station, plus all external advertising and publicity. Rounding out her list of activities, Fielder plays three

intramural sports and has been a varsity cheerleader for four years, serving as squad captain in 1998.

As regional student representative for the National Association for Campus Activities, Fielder has a chance to bring the best ideas home to Eckerd, where she's planned a casino night and a Spring Swing as activities coordinator for the Hough Campus Center.



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"The theory behind NACA is that so much learning goes on outside of the classroom," Fielder says. "That's something Eckerd really supports. I've seen it so much myself, through international study abroad, finding those to be the experiences where I've definitely learned the most."

Since coming to Eckerd, Fielder has studied in Italy and China, completed service-learning in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and performed in the French Theatre Festival in Avignon. "Despite the fact that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was in French, the meaning came

through for everyone," says Fielder, a theatre minor. "We all shared this common bond that made language unnecessary."

In South America, Fielder and 20 other students worked in a refugee camp and on a plantation to build and clean homes for orphans. "I don't speak a word of Spanish. You could just share through gestures and hugs. You didn't have to know their language to express concern for the people," says Fielder, who kept a journal during the trip. "We worked hard, but it was so much fun bonding with the people—their expressions of gratitude were what made it all worthwhile."

Along with the Costa Rica trip, a 1998 summer study in Geneva with the United Nations led Fielder to broaden her focus from domestic law to international policy and to set a goal of becoming a UN special rapporteur for women's rights in Africa. On campus, Fielder presented a section on women's issues

in a human rights course and reinstated an Amnesty International chapter. "I'm really interested in cross-cultural comparisons and why those differences exist," she says.

To keep track of her full-speed schedule, Fielder jots reminders on her mirrors with inkboard markers. "Everything is laid-back at Eckerd—things start 10 minutes late, and I always get there 10 minutes early, so I carry notes on little projects to work on in those 15-minute segments," says Fielder, who takes power naps, writes poetry, and goes out with friends in her "spare" time.

Because Fielder sees leadership potential in everyone, she refuses to recognize apathy. "I hear students and faculty say there's a great deal of apathy, and I've never really seen that, mostly because I try to focus on each individual person's strengths. And I see them exhibit their strengths in a multitude of ways—not just through 'traditional' leadership roles."

Watching a staffer run with an assignment delights Fielder. "I'm a delegator of responsibility, and I like to see people take on tasks that they're motivated to do and interested in pursuing, because that's the way I was trained," says

Fielder, who credits Eckerd for providing a training ground for student leaders.

Much like her, Fielder's response to the frequently asked, "What motivates you?" isn't stock. "I really think it comes from personal strength that I don't know if I was blessed with or raised with," she says. "I have a lot of heroes. It's usually people you've never heard of—people who've made a difference, and they've never given up. I try to emulate their strength and focus on what can be done, even if a lot of other people think it can't be accomplished." ▀