

# SU students study chocolate

By JONATHAN ADAMS

Sarah Reeves learned more about chocolate this summer than she expected.

After extensive research in Dr. Romi Burks' chocolate class at Southwestern University, she discovered that Hershey's milk chocolate bars are not really chocolate but instead candy, as the bars only have 11 percent cacao.

"Every bar tastes the exact same. Whereas big chocolate makers see flavor in chocolate as a defect, bean-to-bar makers see it as an opportunity to show off the flavor of the chocolate and its origins," Ms. Reeves said.

"We learned about the entire bean-to-bar process and how chocolate is made from a bean from theobroma cacao and only a few percentage of trees even produce beans that can be made into quality chocolate."



Romi Burks

Southwestern University students Sarah Reeves, left, and Alex Wilhelm test the cacao levels in American chocolate bars.

*Continued on 3A*



# University students learn about chocolate

*Continued from 1A*

Dr. Burks, a professor of biology at Southwestern, has incorporated chocolate into lesson plans for the past decade. The course is typically a first-year seminar for college freshmen, but last month she used chocolate to teach science and social justice.

"When I first came to Southwestern 10 years ago, I taught a class called invertebrate biology and used a book that was heavy in evolutionary relationships. Well, the students did not have a lot of background in that," Dr. Burks said.

"I had this great idea to teach students how to think about organisms and species, using American candy bars. If you take your classic Hershey's, Snickers, Reese's peanut butter cups — you can analyze all of their traits and sort them."

While the course is unique, it is not the only one in the country.

"There's a few chocolate classes around the country. I have a friend at Harvard University who teaches a class, but it's focused on the social science side of chocolate," Dr. Burks said.

"What's unique about my class is it is really founded in the liberal arts."

The class was titled "Does chocolate have a dark side," a play on the word "dark," and Dr. Burks tried to get students to look at chocolate from multiple angles, such as music, art, and biology.

"It's not produced in the greatest social or environmental conditions, and then



Southwestern University student TK Kim adds nuts to his chocolate bars.

Romi Burks

there's also dark chocolate — which is on the forefront of being a health food full of anti-oxidants," Dr. Burks said.

"Chocolate can make anything interesting. There's so many connections that you can make."

Some of the activities the students participated in included going to Central Market and collecting data about their chocolate selections, and learning how to make chocolate with Bob Williamson, who owns the Austin-based Srsly Chocolate company.

"We went and made chocolate at Bob Williamson's chocolate production facility in Liberty Hill. We went through all the processes it takes to make chocolate from the bean," Dr. Burks said.

"The students were excited when they found out they were going to make chocolate, but they were overwhelmed at the labor process. They had a really good time, though."

For Ms. Reeves, the class changed her perspective on dark chocolate and the chocolate industry.

"Before the class, I hated dark chocolate because I thought it was incredibly bitter and had no taste. Dr. Burks brought in the best dark chocolate from bean-to-bar makers from around the world and showed me that chocolate is an art and each bar should taste different," Ms. Reeves said.

"After tasting bean to bar chocolate, the mass-produced bars like Hershey, Nestle, Lindt, and others started to taste like dirt."