
Speaker to discuss child labor in chocolate industry

WILLIMANTIC — Fiona Vernal, associate professor of history at the University of Connecticut, will speak at Eastern Connecticut State University Wednesday to discuss “The Hidden Cost of Chocolate: How Child Labor Became a Human Right Issue.”

Her talk is on Wednesday at 3 p.m. in the Student Center Theatre. The public is invited. Admission is free.

Vernal has addressed the issue of child labor abuses in the cocoa harvesting industry in her classes, contributing to an on-campus exhibition on the same

subject. The exhibition was based on the documentary film, “The Dark Side of Chocolate,” released in 2010.

In the film, directors Robin Romano and Miki Mistrati exposed cocoa harvesting-related human rights violations in the Ivory Coast in West Africa.

Eighty percent of the world’s chocolate is harvested in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, where children ages 10-15 are often forced to do hard labor on the cocoa plantations without pay.

Observers said the exhibition reflected “corporate greed, consumerism and

human suffering through a series of graphic posters displaying shocking statistics, historical information, forms of advocacy and the photographs of Romano.”

“Students have flocked to Professor Vernal’s class, and I believe she will touch the hearts of everyone attending her presentation,” said Stacey Close, Eastern’s associate vice president for equity and diversity.

Close encourages the public to attend Vernal’s lecture to learn more about the “hidden cost of chocolate.”