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Press release : 2013 : 05 : 10 : Students call experimental course on field research a big success

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Students in the Field Experiential Methods course worked with this underwater sensing device.
By all indications, an experimental environmental science course taught for the first time during the spring semester was a big success.

The undergraduate selected topics course, “Field Experiential Methods,” combined time in the classroom with hands-on field research in Tampa Bay. It was designed by David Fries, director of the Ecosystems Technology Group at the College of Marine Science.

“This is a terrific example of recent collaborations and expanding opportunities that exist between USF St. Petersburg and the USF College of Marine Science,” said Frank Biafora, Ph.D., dean of the USFSP College of Arts and Sciences.

Students used an underwater sensing device to gather data about water in parts of Tampa Bay. The device, created by Fries originally to gather data about red tide, is “like having a human in a can,” Fries said. The data gathered by the students can be fed into computer models used to predict tides and storm surge, said Fries, who hopes the student work will be published in a research journal.

“This is what we should be doing given recent advances in technology,” said graduating senior Mason Jeffers, one of seven students in the class. “It would be ridiculous to try and learn environmental science only inside the classroom.” He thinks taking the course will help to better position him for graduate school.

“It’s an amazingly good idea,” said Ben Prueitt, a graduating senior who plans to attend the College of Marine Science in the fall. “I think it sets up a balanced teaching model for the future.”

“Applied environmental field sciences is growing in importance, especially for our geographic area and an increasingly important learning objective put forth by the faculty within the Department of Environmental Science, Policy and Geography,” said Biafora. Future collaborations between USFSP and the College of Marine Science are already being considered, Biafora said.

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