8-4-2008

Press release : 2008 : 08 : 04 : Teachers Conduct Aquatic Research in Pilot Program

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Teachers Conduct Aquatic Research in Pilot Program

Story by James Kneblik

Pinellas County teachers became summer scientists during an education program at USF St. Petersburg where in-depth environmental research was carefully analyzed and then creatively applied to the elementary school classroom.

The Understanding the Profile of Tampa Bay’s Aquatic Quality program trained seven 4th and 5th grade school teachers during its pilot term, July 7 - Aug 1.

Kathy Carvalho-Knighton, PhD, assistant professor of chemistry and principle investigator for the UPTAQ program, said this new program allows the university to distill scientific information for elementary students.

"We not only have a responsibility to teach students at the university level, but to encourage young minds in science," Carvalho-Knighton said.

Three professors and six graduate students presented curriculum topics such as toxins found within water and sediment, global positioning system technology, core sampling and water quality analysis, and geographic information systems. During the first three days, participants collected sediment cores and water quality measurements from Palm River and Emerson Point, and then analyzed the data in campus labs during the program.

Kerry Hogan, UPTAQ participant and teacher from Westgate Elementary School, said, "It’s scary to know what kind of stuff is out there," referring to the levels of toxin found within soil during his research. "But at the same time, it’s really encouraging to see what these guys are doing as graduate students at USF St. Petersburg."

After participating in UPTAQ, four out of the seven teachers plan to continue their education this fall through the College of Education at USF St. Petersburg.

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