



THE WOODS HOLE RESEARCH CENTER

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International Team of Students and Scientists Departing for Month-Long Field Course in Siberian Arctic

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New York Times Science Writer Andrew Revkin discusses the Polaris Project in his blog.

Scientists and undergraduate students from across the United States and Russia are departing July 2 for a month-long field course in the Russian Arctic. The program, known as The Polaris Project, is training future leaders in arctic research and education, and informing the public about the impacts of climate change.



Participants from the 2008 Polaris Project Summer Field Course in Cherskiy.

Dr. R. Max Holmes, a senior scientist at the Woods Hole Research Center and director of the Polaris Project, says, "The Arctic is central to the global climate change issue, and Russia has by far the largest share of the Arctic. Yet few western scientists, much less students, ever get the chance to work in the Siberian Arctic. This research experience is a unique collaboration among students, educators, and scientists from distinct cultures working together to address a critically important scientific challenge."

Holmes, adds, "The education and outreach aspects of this project are essential goals given the rapid and profound transformations underway in the Arctic in response to global warming."

This is the second year of the Polaris Project field course. The focus of the students' and scientists' work will be the transport and transformations of carbon and nutrients as they move with water from terrestrial uplands to the Arctic Ocean, with an emphasis on the linkages among the different ecosystems, and how processes occurring in one component influence the others.

Participating institutions include The Woods Hole Research Center, Carleton College, Clark University, Holy Cross College, St. Olaf College, University of Nevada – Reno, Western Washington University, and Yakustk State University.

Andy Bunn, a faculty member at Western Washington University, comments, "I did not appreciate the massive changes underway in the Arctic before traveling to Siberia last year. Yet, that change is just likely beginning. I'm excited to return this year and to see this anew with the fresh crop of students. They are the luckiest undergraduates in the country."

While in Siberia, the students and scientists will be based at the Northeast Science Station, which is located approximately 80 kilometers south of the Arctic Ocean on the Kolyma River, near Cherskiy. The participants will stay on a 30-meter barge that will serve as a mobile base for field trips up and down the river.

Boyd Zapatka, an undergraduate who went last year and who is participating again this year, says, "My experiences in Siberia have taught me more about science than I have ever learned in any classroom. With the help of the professors involved, I have learned how the different Arctic system components function and how this balance is being disturbed.



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Furthermore, I now understand how the research process works, how data collection and analysis is performed, and how to formulate hypotheses and test them. While in Siberia, I was able to explore the surrounding landscape, ask questions, and seek answers. I feel very fortunate to have been given this opportunity (twice, as I am returning again this summer) and am excited to return this summer to learn more from the participating scientists and the new students involved and to continue my own research."

In addition to the field course, The Polaris Project includes research experience for undergraduate students in the Siberian Arctic, several new arctic-focused undergraduate courses taught by project co-primary investigators (PIs) at their home institutions, the opportunity for those co-PIs to initiate research programs in the Siberian Arctic, and a wide range of outreach activities. (See attached graphic for a visual guide to the partnering institutions and outreach activities.) All project participants, both students and faculty, will visit kindergarten through Grade 12 classrooms to convey the excitement of polar research.

Kirill Tretyakov, a student from Yakutsk State University, in Siberia, will be participating in this year's trip. He says, "I wanted to join the Polaris Project to research global warming and to help find some solutions to this problem. I believe that it is possible to stop the terrible effects of climate change, but it will take much time and effort. Experiences like this one will help us to make people understand how important it is for everyone to breathe clean air and to see blue skies and green trees."

Sudeep Chandra, a faculty member at the University of Nevada – Reno, adds, "The Polaris project is an exciting and innovative approach to engage young scientists, professors and students alike, to think about careers in climate research. The goal is to bring them to the most complicated parts of the world that are responding to increased temperatures and as a result increasing the climate change back home through the increase of CO₂ and methane into the air. As aspiring scientists, another goal is bringing creative ideas to studying issues related to climate change as well as inspiring participants to spread the word about how climate impacts almost every facet of our society."

This work is being supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation.

To learn more, visit thepolarisproject.org. Follow the progress of the team on Twitter (PolarisTweet) and Facebook (www.thepolarisproject.org).

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