

A Summer Class for Teachers

Published in the Fall 2005 Steinhardt School of Education Newsletter, pgs.1 and 7

Teachers studied the Hudson River this summer in a professional development program offered by Steinhardt's Wallerstein Collaborative for Urban Environmental Education.

The Hudson River Summer Program, an interdisciplinary course for elementary through college teachers of all fields, introduced teachers to the history, geology, and ecology of the Hudson River estuary. Funded by the New York City Environmental Fund and directed by Mary Leou, clinical assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, the program gave teachers an opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to implement ecological studies in their classrooms.

"Our program is unique because we use the environment as a context for learning while providing teachers with a direct experience with nature. The process is transformative and carries over into classroom practice," says Leou, director of the Wallerstein Collaborative. "We also continue to work with participants by creating long-term partnerships in the schools where they teach, thus developing a community of learners engaged in studying and caring for the local environment."

The three-week program kicked off with a presentation by noted author and ichthyologist, John Waldman. Students also attended a water quality-monitoring workshop at the South Street Seaport Museum and took a walking tour of Lower Manhattan with Going Coastal author, Barbara LaRocco. The highlight of the course was a sail on the Hudson River Clearwater Sloop.

At the final meeting, teachers expressed the importance of training through hands-on experience. Amanda Ferris from the Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies (MS 448) found the experience gave her tools for "incorporating real-world meaningful experiences" into her classroom. "I feel better prepared to help my students, many of them struggling learners, understand, be inspired by, and find alternative resources for some of the academic work they will be tackling in the year ahead."

For Karen Balliet, a teacher in CUNY's Adult and Continuing Education Program, the program was simply moving. "I have raised a sail! With my own eyes I've seen an isopod, a diving beetle, jelly fish, an exuvia, a red eft, an eyed-clicked beetle, and the elegant harbor herons," she said.