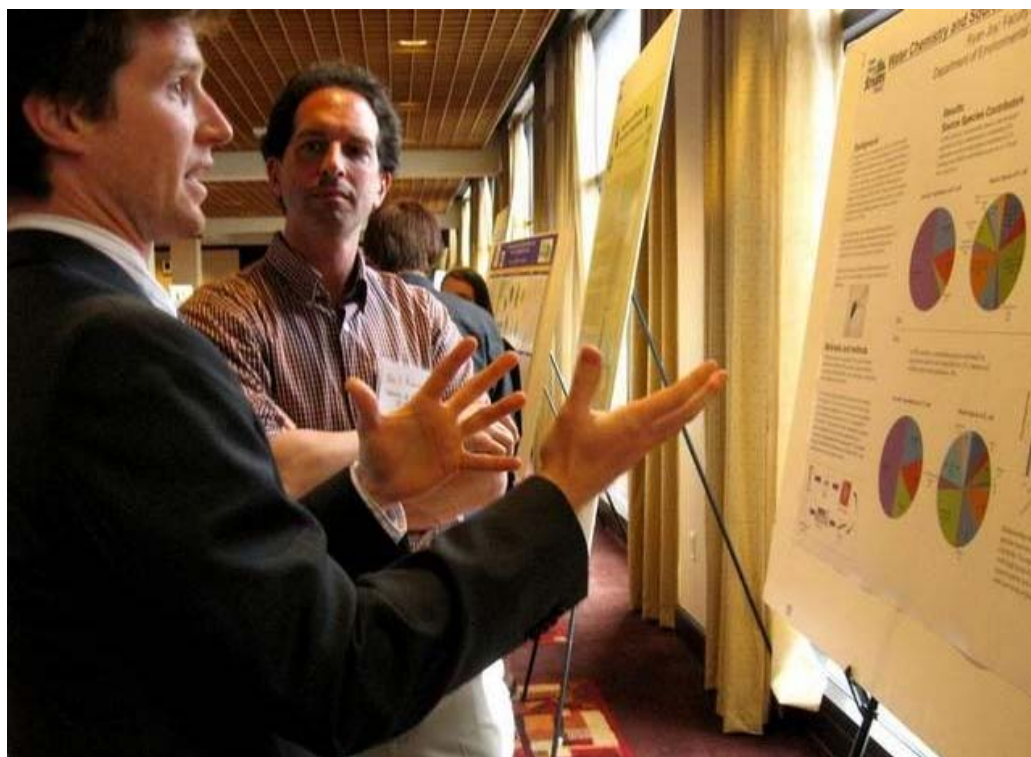


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Stream researchers share data in Vermont

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Ryan Joy (left), a junior at Johnson State College, explains his water quality research Tuesday to Neil Kamman, a scientist at the Vermont Department of Environmental Quality, at a Streams Project symposium at the Hilton Burlington. / JOEL BANNER BAIRD, Free Press

Written by
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Some scooted over from St. Michael's College. Some jetted over from Puerto Rico.

All of them agreed that good questions outnumber pat answers in good science.

About 140 students, educators and professional scientists who congregated Tuesday afternoon at the Hilton Burlington studiously — and gleefully — swapped quandaries-in-progress.

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How can we reliably know if a beaver colony is fouling its (and our) watershed with *E. coli* bacteria?

What's the best, most reliable and cheapest way to test the health of aquatic bugs — better known in these circles as macro-invertebrates?

What mathematical formulae will save time, and yield meaningful statistics in the quest to track phosphorus from soil to Lake Champlain?

The gathering was coordinated by the University of Vermont's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) Stream Project as a sort of end-of-research-year event: a formal way to gather its far-flung participants together to compare notes.

More broadly, the program aims to include students in relevant environmental inquiry — for practical, as well as educational reasons.

"More good data lets more people ask more powerful questions," said St. Michael's College biology professor Declan McCabe, who helped establish the project.

"Beyond that, it's murky statistics," he said. "I'm excited by the murky statistics."

Participants are told up front their work will add to a bank of publicly accessible, high-quality data about rivers and streams in the Lake Champlain Basin. The standards are high; approved high-level research by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.


In its third year, the program pools expertise from UVM, St. Michael's College, Johnson State College and the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. It is funded by the National Science Foundation.

The stream project's collective approach has broadened its scope to include schools and colleges in New York, Delaware, Rhode Island, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

This year was the first for the Lyndon Institute, where six seniors sampled several streams in the Northeast Kingdom to see how land use affects water quality.


It extended science classes into a time-consuming, but satisfying independent project, said Nick McClure, 18.

The Lyndon team worked all fall until the streams froze over.

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Students at the University Gardens High School in San Juan didn't have that problem. But they encountered a macro-invertebrate, Diptera chironomidae, that flourished at the expense of other creatures during hotter-than-usual weather, said Stephanie Rivera-Morales, 18.

Two Puerto Rican scholars opted to migrate north. Veronica Sosa-Gonzalez, 24, and Angel Garcia, 26, who had been undergraduate interns during the summer of 2009, enrolled last fall as graduate students at UVM in natural resources and geology, respectively.

Both plan to serve as mentors this summer to a fresh crop of interns.

Henry Moncure IV and Emma Rice, both 18 and seniors at the Charter School of Wilmington (Del.), explained the results of their study of White Clay Creek as it flowed through forest, farmland and urban landscapes.

The data yielded no real surprises or anomalies, Rice said.

Her father (and biology teacher) Conrad Rice was sympathetic.

"Students can sometimes be disappointed when things aren't terribly wrong," he said. "They were kind of looking for headlines. It's almost a let-down."

The results didn't affect their grades.

Nor, said McCabe, was the symposium in any way a competition.

"There is no judging here," he said. "People come to see each other's results. Because it's fun."

Discover more about the stream program at <http://bit.ly/UVMstreams>.

Contact Joel Banner Baird at 660-1843 or joelbaird@burlingtonfreepress.com. Baird's blog: <http://bit.ly/BairdsEye>. Become a fan of the Burlington Free Press page on Facebook at www.facebook.com/bfpnews.

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