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Hu Helps Teachers With 'Real Science' Lessons

December 07, 2009 | By Samieh Shalash, sshalash@dailypress.com 247-4537

Portsmouth science teacher Barbara Taber doesn't teach students about the Chesapeake Bay by standing in front of the room and lecturing.

Thanks to a grant that allows Hampton University to work with teachers in Portsmouth on incorporating more "real science" into lessons, the Churchland High teacher uses a host of hands-on activities to teach about the bay.

"In the past I would have talked to students about it, but would not have had them out with GPS units taking the exact locations of storm drains in the city," Taber said.

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That's just the start of a lesson she led to teach about the effect of pollutants on the bay. For the second year, she's working with HU through a nearly \$150,000 grant it received for a professional development program from the State Council for Higher Education of Virginia.

Staff from HU's Interdisciplinary Science Center are working with 30 teachers from public and private schools in Portsmouth to help them teach science subjects more effectively to their students, said ISC Director Dianne Robinson.

"My department forms a bridge between the scientists and educators so they have an opportunity to learn about cutting-edge science," Robinson said.

Last year, the focus was on "problem-based learning," or giving students problems to solve as a method of teaching. This year, the grant's focus is on how to teach students about Virginia's watersheds and energy resources, Robinson said.

Hands-on activities that challenge and engage students are a major component of the program. As an example, Robinson said teachers can demonstrate heat absorption by shining light on both black sand and white sand.

"Then students can see the darker sand, and say 'Wow, it gets much, much hotter,' " she said.

The program will end in early June with a three-day field exhibition to James River State Park in Central Virginia, where Robinson said teachers will conduct water sampling and other activities to learn how they can use the environment to teach science.

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