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HOW SALTY IS THE SOUND?

Students on board SoundWaters ship have a lab in their home waters



Christian Abraham / Hearst Connecticut Media

Stamford High School student Chuanmai Husu throws out a plankton net as she and another student execute research projects in the SoundWaters Research Intensive program from SoundWaters' research boat in Stamford Harbor on Wednesday.

By Ignacio Laguarda

STAMFORD — For a couple days every week, a small group of students from Stamford and surrounding areas get to use Stamford Harbor as their own personal research lab.

The students are part of the SoundWaters Research Intensive program, or SRI, which is meant for high school students interested in pursuing science studies in college.

During the school year, the program is offered after class, but there is also a two-week intensive course available over the summer. Students who take part in the program get to collect data and samples



Stamford High School student Lindsay Taylor monitors birds as part of the SoundWaters Research Intensive program.

aboard a 24-foot boat, referred to as the SoundWaters research vessel.

On Wednesday afternoon, two Stamford High School students — Lindsay Taylor and Chuanmai Husu — were on the research vessel collecting data.

A few minutes after leaving the dock at Boccuzzi Park, they teamed up to chronicle the birds and waterfowl they spotted on the ride. Taylor held a bird field guide and used a pair of binoculars to identify some of the avians, while Husu put them into the online database eBird using an iPad.

Later, once the boat reached the east branch of the harbor between South End and Shippan, the students collected water

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data using a data sonde device that takes measurements including water temperature, salinity and depth, among other metrics.

The students did the same activities at two other locations in the harbor with the help of Michael Bagley, vice president of programs and captain of the vessel. The students also used a small net attached to a bottle to collect plankton before returning to Boccuzzi Park after an hour-and-a-half ride on the boat.

"I always wanted to try hands-on experiments, which I never really tried," Taylor said. "I always studied this stuff in school and I've always found it interesting but I never got the full experience. I like to learn about different problems in the environment and, once I learn a lot more about it, then you can find solutions."

Husu has taken other programs at SoundWaters, she said, because she has an interest in marine biology.

One of her favorite parts of the SRI experience is collecting and studying plankton.

"I feel like having the hands-on, getting in there, is really cool," she said.

By the end of the semester, the students give a presentation on their findings.

Both Husu and Taylor were in the SRI program in the fall and each did their own research presentation in front of teachers and school officials, including Stamford Public Schools Superintendent Tamu Lucero.

Husu did her research on water salinity, examining how it changes depending on rainfall, while Taylor focused on comparing the quality of water at three different parts of the harbor — discovering that the one farthest away from shore was the healthiest, among other findings.

The students use the data they collect along with historical data that has been collected from the same areas for years to compare and contrast. On days when the students aren't on the water, they are analyzing samples in the lab and working on research projects based on data collected from the Long Island Sound or from their own independent work, they said.

This semester, there are 12 students taking part in the program. But once the new \$8 million Cohen SoundWaters Harbor Center opens at Boccuzzi Park this year, the program is likely to be expanded, officials said.

Currently, the program is in its spring session, which lasts for about three months. Students get one day in the lab and one on the boat almost every week. The students have to apply and interview to be included in the program, which is offered free of charge thanks to donations from foundations and corporations.

SoundWaters has long offered an after-school program, but it looked much different in the past. Now, it is much more sci-



Christian Abraham / Hearst Connecticut Media

Stamford High School student Lindsay Taylor uses a data sonde to analyze a water sample as part of various research projects in the Soundwaters Research Intensive program from SoundWaters' research boat in Stamford Harbor on Wednesday.



SoundWaters' research boat Capt. Mike Bagley prepares a data sonde, which analyzes water, during a trip around Stamford Harbor with high school students taking part in the Soundwaters Research Intensive program.

ence-based, said Bob Mazzone, vice president of development for SoundWaters.

"This is preparing kids who have an interest in science for college-level work," Mazzone said.

Leigh Shemitz, the president of Sound-

Waters, said the program also offers students college-level experience in a location close to home.

"The idea is to use the Sound as your lab," she said, "whether it's to understand about marine debris, water quality chang-



Lindsay Taylor uses a data sonde to analyze a water sample.

es, understand how change works in an ecosystem naturally, what change is part of an ecological cycle, what part is not, understanding small changes over time because that's really the basis of field ecology."

Mazzone said he hopes to see the program grow and turn into something local students can use when applying for colleges and jobs in the future.

"This is such a unique experience that we want to make sure that people know that this is happening," he said. "This is what Stamford High School students are doing. It's good for Stamford. It's good for the kids. It's good for the community."

ignacio.laguarda@stamfordadvocate.com