

Scientists to research on Guana

Four HLS Community College students are conducting research with scientists from several US universities during Marine Science Month on Guana Island this July.

Aasha Flax, Kirsten Lettsome, Denise Jones and Shanie Dasrath will contribute to several long-term studies by asking such questions as: Can we monitor long-term changes in our coral reefs? What creatures inhabit the sandy bottom between reefs? What is the role of sponges on coral reefs? Can we control the reproduction of wetland mosquitoes?, according to Lianna Jarecki, an HLSCC senior lecturer in biology.

Marine Science Month on Guana is a time when marine biologists visit the island to study the ecology of coral reefs, seagrass habitats, rocky shores and mangrove wetlands. Ms. Jarecki coordinates this programme every year. Now in its 10th year, the programme has hosted many important studies and enjoys increasing recognition by the international scientific community, according to her. A comprehensive report of research results and publications is compiled yearly and distributed to relevant offices in the BVI, the biology lecturer said.

The participating scientists work closely with the community college, as well as mentor local high schools through the 'Marine Science Mentorship Programme.' There, between three and eight students work in collaboration with scientists in all aspects of their research from designing experiments to collecting data and analyzing results.

• 4 BVI students are assisting

This year, scientists from the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, in cooperation with Ms. Jarecki, secured funding from the U.S. National Science Foundation to support three HLSCC students to conduct research full-time on Guana Island for this month. A fourth student has been funded by the Environmental Health Department to study the effects of high salinity on mosquito larvae. Each student will design his or her own research project in conjunction with the scientists involved in Guana's long-term marine monitoring programmes.

An ongoing component of Marine Science Month has been the participation of the LA County Museum and University of Rhode Island, Ms. Jarecki said. This July,

the LACM has sent out Todd Zimmerman, Dr. Joel Martin and several other researchers to continue their survey of small marine invertebrates around Guana. The study reportedly aims to describe the physical characteristics, habitat and general ecology of small invertebrate species, most of which are less than one inch long. A unique feature of this programme will be the development of a teaching tool, including full colour photographs with descriptions, within a web site that will be available to marine biology students and teachers in the BVI, according to the senior biology lecturer.

"[It] is the first time HLSCC students will conduct independent research projects during Marine Science Month, providing a rewarding experience for both the students and the scientists on Guana this year," Ms. Jarecki noted. Tomorrow, the scientists and students participating in Marine Science Month are to present a public symposium on marine research at the community college in Paraquita Bay from 5:00-7:30 p.m. All are invited to meet the scientists and students, she said.