A student from South Terrebonne High School measures the salinity of Price Bayou.

The Bayouside Classroom

Connecting kids to science

A 6th grade student from Little Calliou Elementary School measures the dissolved oxygen content in a sample from LUMCON.

Students from South Terrebonne High School work in groups to collect data from Price Bayou.

Rural Terrebonne Parish, the location of the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON), is linked physically, culturally, and economically to the Gulf of Mexico by the lacework of bayous that carry water and sediments from the Mississippi River. Despite this setting, there is very little formal education in marine or aquatic sciences within the parish. Such education is even more urgent in a region that is experiencing coastal land loss at rates up to 35 square miles per year, and whose continental shelf experiences seasonal hypoxia in an area known as the "Dead Zone." To help address this deficiency, a team of scientists at LUMCON, in cooperation with the Terrebonne Parish School District, has developed a field-based initiative for grades 6 to12 that is based in state and national science education standards. Students learn about basic scientific concepts (e.g., photosynthesis) and scientific methods while collecting and analyzing water chemistry samples from local waterways. Although begun as a field experience limited to the LUMCON campus, the effort has expanded into a year-long program that includes teacher workshops, classroom visits by LUMCON scientists, a field trip to LUMCON, and weekly sampling of local waterways. A Web-accessible database allows teachers to develop curricula based on student generated data from throughout the parish.

Christopher Finelli, Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium, OCE 00-94169