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Science Teacher Prepares for Polar Expedition

Climate change and global warming are recurring topics in the news media, but just how much do people really know about these environmental concerns? Brandon Gillette, an eighth- and ninth-grade science teacher at California Trail Junior High School, is willing to travel to the South Pole for six weeks beginning this December to gather more facts about the current state of polar ice caps and how changes there affect people all over the world, even in Kansas.

Gillette is one of 15 teachers selected through a nationwide search to participate in PolarTREC, an educational research project that allows teachers to experience first-hand what it is like to conduct scientific research in some of the remote locations on earth.



While on field expeditions, teachers and researchers will share their experiences with scientists, educators, communities and students of all ages through the use of



Internet tools such as online teacher and researcher journals, message boards, photo albums, pod casts, live presentations and calls from the field as well as online learning resources. After working in the field, teachers and researchers will continue to share their experiences with the public and will create instructional activities to transfer scientific data, methodologies and technology to the classroom.

The expedition that Gillette will be part of involves a team of researchers from Penn State University, which is one of five institutions in a grant program called the Center for Remote Sensing of Ice Sheets (CREGIS) and stationed at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

"Our expedition involves a trip from McMurdo Station, Antarctica, to the West Atlantic Ice Sheet (WAIS) Divide Camp," Gillette said. "Testing of seismic instruments will be the primary goal of this trip. These instruments are used to gather data about the boundary between the land and the ice. This information will be fed into models predicting

how ice sheets behave over time, and how they relate to glacial mass balance and sea level rise."

Gillette explained that PolarTREC's big push is for education research.

"We want to get other teachers, students, parents and community members interested in polar research as well as science and research in general," he said. "The outreach opportunities are designed to give students a closer look at what scientists and researchers are doing. They are real people too, and students need to realize that someday they too can take a trip to the Arctic or Antarctic."

Gillette added that PolarTREC is a professional development experience unlike any other.

"Climate change and global warming have really become buzz words, and this project is a valiant effort to present facts," he said. "All of this information ties directly into science curriculum, and this presents a way for students to be involved in real science with real data. The students become part of the research."

Gillette added, "I am extremely excited for the personal experience from this project, even though the main goal is outreach. If we can get just one student or one member of the community excited about polar research, and they become more involved or become a scientist themselves, then this project is a success!"

For more information on the PolarTrec experience, visit <http://www.polartrec.com/>.

(Photo: Brandon Gillette tries out an ice igloo at the World Ice Art Championships in Fairbanks, Alaska. The ice chunks were carved from several 8,000-pound blocks of ice.)

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