

Climate research professor slates live Web presentation tomorrow



Written by Sylvain Rey

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Biology associate professor Laura Gough will participate in a live Internet presentation from her camp in Alaska at noon Thursday.

The presentation, called Live from IPY, is part of the International Polar Year and will be broadcast live from Toolik Field Station, 350 miles north of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Gough has conducted research in Alaska for more than 10 years, studying arctic plant ecology and climate change as part of the Polar TREC expeditions.

Polar TREC is a program developed by Arctic Research Consortium of the United States, a non-profit organization based in Fairbanks, Alaska.

ARCUS project manager Janet Warburton said the Polar TREC program matches a teacher with a researcher. Gough works with Catherine Campbell, a teacher at Scarlet Middle School in Michigan.

Polar TREC has several objectives, including improving teachers' knowledge of polar science and instructional practices, improving researcher's knowledge of K-12 education, and promoting students' understanding and engagement in polar regions.

"Live from IPY events are a tool developed by ARCUS to help teachers and researchers convey their research to the public," Warburton said.

During the presentation, students will have the opportunity to chat and ask questions about Gough's research and other fundamental issues, such

as climate change.

Gough's research has focused on how Arctic tundra plant communities respond to climate change, how they interact with soils and how they are affected by animals that eat them — particularly small mammals such as voles and big mammals such as caribou, she said.

"We are particularly interested in how these changes to the plant communities affect carbon cycling in the Arctic in general," she said. Because the amount of carbon stored in Arctic plants is significant, when it gets warmer, carbon dioxide is released in higher quantity. Carbon release from such a large area can have global consequences for global warming, she said.

Gough said live presentations bring better understanding to participants about the topic.

"We are doing this presentation to allow the general public and, in particular, students at all levels to learn a bit more about Arctic research, and ask questions directly to scientists and teachers who are involved in real time, as opposed to simply visiting a Web page or reading a scientific paper," she said.

Gough participates in the presentation because it is important to pass on this knowledge.

"Scientists predict that the polar ice cap may melt entirely and this can have dramatic consequences for the temperature of the globe," she said. "Which can affect weather patterns in Texas and elsewhere."

She also participates because she feels it is part of a scientist's role in society.

"Being a scientist is an incredibly stimulating and rewarding experience," she said. "I like to take opportunities to explain my science to laymen so that they will have a better understanding of climate change in particular,

which is such an important issue today," she said.

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