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Triton College

For immediate release: **Dec. 13, 2023**

Triton College Instructor, Dr. Sheldon Turner, Participated in STEMSEAS Program
Dr. Turner Conducted Research at Sea for 10 Days



Dr. Turner in his survival "gumby" suit that he wore aboard the STEMSEAS cruise.

RIVER GROVE – Dr. Sheldon Turner, chairperson of Triton College’s Science Department, spent 10 days at sea conducting oceanic research with the STEMSEAS Program. STEMSEAS, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF), provides six-to-10-day ocean excursions for undergraduate students to conduct research and build a sense of belonging in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

This STEMSEAS cruise, aboard the R/V Thompson, was the Inaugural Community College Faculty Expedition. The aim was to train future STEMSEAS mentors among community college faculty and help promote the program to more community college students.

“There were 13 faculty members from across the country selected to participate,” said Dr. Turner. “I was the only representative from the Midwest.”

Leaving Seattle on Nov. 2, and landing in Honolulu on Nov. 11, those aboard used the ship’s science labs to conduct scientific research, such as how much salt was in the water, as well as the ocean’s temperature. Dr. Turner was fascinated by the plankton and other organisms that could be viewed under microscopes just from a drop of water.

“For most of the trip we saw no boats, planes or signs of life outside,” he said. “Under a microscope, the ocean is full of living organisms.”

The faculty were also surprised to find a lot of tiny, pieces of plastic that were seen under a microscope. Even 1,000 miles from shore, microplastic was still found within the ocean.

Other research included mapping the seafloor with sonar, deploying Argo and XBT instruments, collecting wave and wind data, and many others.

One of Dr. Turner’s favorite parts of the trip was when he collected volcanic rocks from 3,500 meters (over two miles) below sea level from a 2-million-year-old underwater landslide, bringing them home to be studied by Triton students.

“I loved seeing the rare marine life, such as a whale shark that came to the surface while we were dredging the rocks,” said Dr. Turner. “As we got closer to Hawaii, we saw beautiful mahi-mahi fish.”

Dr. Turner admits that it was a challenge getting adjusted to being out at sea, since there were two major storms in the North Pacific. The large waves made it difficult to sleep, leaving many faculty feeling nauseous. After taking medicine and caring for each other, everyone on board was able to get used to being out at sea.

“The amazing kitchen staff helped with getting adjusted,” noted Dr. Turner. “There was a full kitchen and a crew to help make our stay more comfortable. We were

given three meals a day, with delicious food options, and plenty of snacks and coffee at any time of day.”

Dr. Turner said he had a great experience overall and plans to go on another expedition as a mentor during the summer months. His biggest hope is for Triton students to get involved in future STEMSEAS trips.

“Scientific research may inspire first year college students to go into and stick with science,” he explained. “There is also a large maritime industry in the Great Lakes region, and I hope these experiences and changes to my own curriculum can help students find career opportunities they may never have known about.”

The expedition and the STEMSEAS Program is funded by the National Science Foundation through a grant to Columbia University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP). STEMSEAS is also supported by a partnership with the University National Oceanographic Laboratory Systems (UNOLS).

To read Dr. Turners blog during the excursion, visit stemseas.wordpress.com/2023/11/06/being-a-student-again/.

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ABOUT TRITON COLLEGE

Triton College is a two-year college dedicated to helping members of the 25 Western Cook County communities in our district and beyond to achieve educational, professional and personal success. Located in River Grove, Ill., Triton offers more than 120 degree and certificate programs on its 110-acre campus, featuring a comfortable, friendly and diverse atmosphere. Triton also holds classes at satellite locations and offers online learning opportunities. Triton’s dedicated faculty and staff work to provide high quality, convenient and affordable educational opportunities to more than 14,000 students each year. Triton College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission. Learn more at <http://www.triton.edu/>.

