

## S.F. teacher's polar trip explores cool science

By: [Amy Crawford](#) | 04/13/12 1:13 PM

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When Amber Lancaster's students heard she was planning to spend six weeks in Antarctica, they were surprised, to say the least.

"I thought it was kind of insane, because Antarctica is really desolate — at least, that's what I thought," said Roger Davila, 17, a senior in Lancaster's marine biology class at the June Jordan School for Equity in the Excelsior district.

But Davila and his classmates admired their teacher's sense of adventure, and since she arrived at the southernmost continent in March, they have learned Antarctica isn't quite the wasteland they imagined that it was.

The trip was organized by PolarTREC, which sends K-12 teachers to the polar regions to participate in hands-on scientific research. The program receives funding from the National Science Foundation and covers all the teachers' expenses, including salaries for substitutes to staff their classrooms.

From an icebreaker in the Weddell Sea, Lancaster has kept in touch with her students through a blog, where she posts pictures and videos of icebergs, penguins and the strange, translucent creatures her team pulls up from the depths of the sea. Her students have also connected with her in a live online chat.

"I want them to understand how scientists are using the changing environment in Antarctica to see how the world as a whole may be affected by global warming," Lancaster said in an email.

Lancaster's research is already having an effect on her students.

Sintia Henriquez, 18, said she had never really liked science before hearing her teacher's real-life accounts.



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Adventure: Amber Lancaster, a marine biology teacher at the June Jordan School for Equity, is spending six weeks in Antarctica. She keeps in regular touch with her students, sharing her experiences and ongoing climate change research.

“Knowing that there are opportunities like this out there with science really gives me a different perspective,” she said. “It’s something that can be fun rather than just a drag.”

Lancaster said she planned to use what she had learned in Antarctica in her classroom after she returns in late April.

“I hope my students realize that there are many amazing opportunities in this world, but to take advantage of them, they have to challenge themselves to step outside of their comfort zones,” she said. “I also want them to view science as an interesting field that they could eventually be a part of.”

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