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Hands-on experience in climate research

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Steve, Leo and Kristen are studying climate change of the past and present in a special UNIS geology course created for the IPY. Tomorrow they head out to Kapp Linné to spend 4 weeks doing intense field investigations into environmental changes in Svalbard.

Text and photos: Eva Therese Jensen

American Kristen Mitchell, Steve Bate from the UK and Leo Sold from Germany are three of 10 undergraduate students who get this unique opportunity to do hands-on field investigations into the past and present climate changes in Svalbard.

The Arctic Geology course “[Holocene and Modern Climate Change in the High Arctic](#)” is arranged in collaboration with the Svalbard Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU). The Svalbard REU is a program run by Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts and funded by the American National Science Foundation.



Steve, Leo and Kristen think the IPY is an excellent time for facilitating scientific collaboration. (Photo: Eva Therese Jensen).

Recruiting future polar scientists

It is the first time such a course has been offered at UNIS and it was established in connection with the International Polar Year (IPY) to offer undergraduate students an opportunity to get field work experience in the Arctic.

- The aim of the Svalbard REU is to recruit future polar scientists through exciting field research work, says Professor Al Werner. He, together with Professor Mike Retelli, are running the course in collaboration with UNIS associate professor Hanne Christiansen.

Seven of the 10 students are American college students. The remaining three students are recruited through the UNIS.

After two days of theoretical lectures and field preparations, the students are heading out to Kapp Linné at the mouth of Isfjorden. There the students will do research for establishing linkages between the climate, glacier mass balance, sediment transport and sedimentation.

Extreme field work experience

Steve (21) has finished his Bachelors degree in geography at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, and is taking this course as part of a year off before he goes for a Master- or Ph.D. degree. – I am taking this course to gain different skills that will be an asset in future studies, he explains.

Leo (23) is an education student at the University of Tübingen and will teach geography in the future to German secondary pupils. – Research on climate change is an important topic in the secondary education curriculum, and I think this course will give me insights into climate change history that will benefit me in my future teaching job, Leo says.

- I look forward to an extreme field work experience that will give me knowledge that I can incorporate in my future studies, says Kristen (21) who plans to study glaciology and climate change in graduate school at a later point.

But it is not only the climate change aspect that draws students from across Europe and the Atlantic to the High Arctic. The IPY aspect of the course is also an important factor.

- The IPY is an excellent time for facilitating scientific collaboration across the borders, says Steve.

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Kristen agrees: - We come from different countries, cultures and educational systems, but I have found that during the two days we have spent together we share more similarities than differences. It is really a cool thing!

This course will only be offered one more time, and that is in the summer of 2010. You can read more about the geology course [here](#).



Steve, Leo and Kristen (front) together with their course mates are heading out to Kapp Linné to do field research on past and present climate changes in Svalbard. (Photo: Eva Therese Jenssen).

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