

TITLE ***VI-EPSCoR –supported activities open unprecedented research experiences for K-12 students in the Virgin Islands***

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OUTCOME Virgin Islands students are being given unprecedented opportunities to conduct high-calibre levels of research. This is providing them with early exposure to the wonders of systematically seeking answers to the unknown, and to the possibilities of science as real academic and career options.

IMPACTS/BENEFITS As a result of VI-EPSCoR's investments and partnerships, more under-represented minorities are channelling their interests to STEM disciplines, particularly marine sciences in the Virgin Islands. This is creating a larger cadre of "home-grown" marine scientists engaged in research and adaptive management of the Territory's coral reef resources upon which the territory's economy is heavily dependent.

EXPLANATION VI-EPSCoR seeks to strengthen the K-12 STEM pipeline in the Virgin Islands through a number of initiatives. These include supporting the *Virgin Islands' Network of Environmental Educators' (VINE)* Adopt-A-School program, partnering with the *Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park* on their summer Science Camp program, and supporting the St. Croix Science Teachers Association's *Mathematics and Environmental Science Academy (MESA)* summer program. Through these partnerships VI-EPSCoR facilitates high school students' access to researchers-in-the-field, high-grade technical equipment, and mentorship by college-level STEM student-interns who work with instructors in the summer programs. The students are experiencing 'real' research for the first time, in ways that have them coming back for more. The *Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park* documented a steady increase in repeat participants to their Science Camp, to an all-time high of 47% in 2011, while the *MESA* program boasts of 83% of the (2011) students indicating that they wanted to be part of the program again in the following summer. The recent opening of a VI-EPSCoR-funded Environmental Analysis Laboratory at UVI further increases the opportunities for academic growth and development of the Territory's future leaders in research.



High school students participate in sediment studies at the Friends of the VI National Park's Science Camp



MESA students present their research findings to UVI, Federal and local Government officials at the opening of the new UVI Environmental Analysis Lab.

Credit: Nicolas Drayton VI-EPSCoR; **Images provided by:** ndrayton@live.uvi.edu

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