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## UT grant project benefits Carpenters, Heritage middle schools

Contributed by Victoria Headrick - Maryville 7/29/2006

The University of Tennessee (UT) is responding to calls at the state and national level to improve science education in the public schools with a new program that places graduate students in rural middle school classrooms to work collaboratively with teachers to enrich science education.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the \$1.97 million program, called GK-12, is designed to broaden science education by funding graduate students to share their research through hands-on science activities that complement the school curriculum. "We have to show these students that science is more than just facts to memorize," said Ken Orvis, a UT associate professor of geography and co-principal investigator on the grant. "We need to show them how science means figuring things out."

One of several GK-12 programs funded by NSF in a nationwide effort, the program will place 10 UT graduate students from the departments of geography and earth and planetary sciences in middle schools in Knox, Blount, Sevier and Jefferson counties this fall.

The graduate students in the program, known as GK-12 fellows, will each work with one specific teacher, spending 10 hours a week with them in the classroom, as well as five hours preparing. Lynn Champion, a co-principal investigator on the grant, said the graduate students will also benefit from the program.

"As UT's top graduate students in their fields, the GK-12 Fellows will become more proficient as career scientists in communicating with the public about their work," said Champion, who is also director of academic outreach for UT's college of arts and sciences. "They will also learn the importance of nurturing young scientists, a value we hope they will carry throughout their careers."

The UT fellows' academic focus centers on investigating past changes in Earth's climate and environment, and their work in the classroom will bring their research to life for the middle schoolers. Middle school students will investigate, for example, how growth rings in local trees or sediment in ponds can reveal past changes in the environment. Students will also work with material from UT research and other international research programs such as the Integrated Ocean Drilling Program, which will provide actual sediment samples collected on marine missions for students to study.

Each GK-12 fellow will work closely with his or her faculty advisor to develop activities that link middle school classrooms with UT research. Students in the classes where UT students will be placed, and their parents, will have the opportunity to visit the UT campus and tour the university's science facilities. The fellows will also host "science nights" at the middle schools in which parents, students and community members can participate in science activities developed in the program.

"Science is action," said Sally Horn, UT geography professor and principal investigator on the grant. "The students will hopefully understand that there are opportunities for investigation and discovery all around them in activities as simple as digging a hole in the ground and studying the soil."

In addition to their teaching time in the schools, the fellows will have a weekly seminar in which they share experiences and meet with a variety of UT faculty to talk about the latest research the most effective methods of science education. The program will begin with a workshop in July to acquaint the middle school

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EVENT CALENDAR

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teachers and their GK-12 fellows and to introduce all of the participants to the program.

Fellows will be placed in classrooms at the following middle schools:

- In Knox County, Halls and Holston middle schools.
- In Sevier County, Seymour and Northview middle schools.
- In Jefferson County, Jefferson Middle School.
- In Blount County, Carpenters and Heritage middle schools.

At Carpenters Middle School teacher Victoria Headrick will work with fellow Saskia van de Gevil-Edidin, and teacher Betsy Tillett with fellow Angela Danovi. At Heritage Middle School teacher Oscar Osario will team with fellow Zachary Taylor and teacher Gregory Metcalf with fellow Chris Underwood.

*The opinions and accuracy of information in this article are the responsibility of the contributor. If you'd like to contribute, [click here to get started](#)*

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