

## Semester by the Bay program back in gear at KBC

By Clark Fair  
KPC Connection coordinator

KBC's Semester by the Bay program is now being offered twice a year, and a dozen Fall Semester students—some from as far away as the East Coast—have been in Homer and in action around the Kenai Peninsula since August.

Accustomed to warmer autumn weather, those students—clad in raingear, knee-high rubber boots and warm hats to protect against the elements, plus facemasks to fend off infection from COVID-19—have toured Kenai Fjords National Park, Halibut Cove Lagoon, Kachemak Bay, Cook Inlet, Kenai river and Bishop's Beach in the pursuit of knowledge.

They have also immersed themselves in rigorous classwork and challenging, practical internships.

This year's SBB students are: (from the University of North Carolina, Wilmington) Abigail Flowers, Alexis Paugh, Diondre Ryan and Mikayla Zyllich; (Coastal Carolina University, in Conway, S.C.) Alex Alasin, Julia Illar and Lindsay Kammuller; (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities) Adina Allen and Thomas Hall; (University of Wisconsin, La Crosse) Ana Noel; (State University of New York for Environmental Science and Forestry) Elona Tanski; and (California Polytechnic State University) Erin Reilly.

Semester by the Bay, which began in 2011, is directed by Dr. Debbie Tobin, KBC professor of biological sciences. Tobin is also co-instructor of the Marine Mammal Biology class with Marc Webber, KBC adjunct and former deputy manager of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, which is headquartered in Homer.

Starting this semester, SBB students will also be able to earn a career boost by adding an Occupational Endorsement Certificate to their resumes. By taking six classes (Advanced Marine Skeletal Articulation, Marine Mammal Biology and Behavioral Ecology of Marine Mammals, with concurrent Experiential Learning Labs, as well as Undergraduate



On a field trip to Northwest Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park (L-R): Back row—Adina Allen, Alexis Paugh, Mikayla Zyllich, Mark Webber, Thomas Hall, Diondre Ryan and Lindsay Kammuller. Middle row—Abigail Flowers and Erin Reilly. Front row—Dr. Debbie Tobin, Julia Illar, Elona Tanski, Ana Noel and Alex Alasin (holding ice). Photos by Jill Burnham.



Diondre Ryan (with camera) and Lindsay Kammuller check out the action at Northwest Glacier.

Seminar and an internship calls), students who earn these 16 credits will be prepared to quickly enter the workforce as technicians, biologists and marine mammal observers (for fisheries and oil/gas exploration).

Outings this fall have included field work at Northwest Glacier in Kenai Fjords National Park, where students documented marine conditions, wildlife and various ecosystems. On their return

trip to Seward, they witnessed a small pod of transient killer whales stalking Steller sea lions at a rookery that had produced more than 80 pups this season.

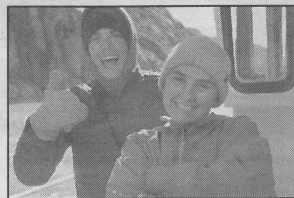
In September, students were on Kachemak Bay and Cook Inlet to document the population of another sea lion haul out. They also observed harbor porpoises as part of a population study, and they encountered a number of humpback whales feeding along the way. More recently they hiked between Bishop's Beach below the Homer Lookout to observe a seal haul-out.

Another key aspect of the students' experience in Semester by the Bay has been the internships, which Dr. Tobin called "crucial to the success of the program." Student interns have worked on marine skeletal articulation with KBC adjunct Lee Post, done environmental education with the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies, assisted with Winged Whale Research, worked with the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Reserve, studied marine ecology with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, worked with the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, and aided in fisheries with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

Dr. Tobin thanked the many organizations offering these internships and also praised the efforts of the Center for Alaskan Coastal Studies and the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve to provide housing to students in exchange for additional internship hours.

"Everyone (also) went the extra mile this year to make COVID accommodations," she added.

Next semester, the SBB program will shift its focus to conservation ecology. Because the program will start with a new group of students in midwinter, the students will perform most of their classroom work before the light returns and the weather warms, thus better accommodating field work and other more hands-on, experiential learning activities.



Thomas Hall (left) and Erin Reilly mug for the camera near Northwest Glacier.