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## UVI Mangroves Program Showcases Territory's Marine Education Leadership at National Conference

UVI's GRROE USVI Mangroves Program sent 14 students, educators, and faculty to the National Marine Educators Association conference in Louisiana, where they presented on local initiatives and highlighted the USVI's leadership in marine science education.

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Group representing the U.S. Virgin Islands at the National Marine Educators Association Conference in Lafayette, LA By. UVI.

The University of the Virgin Islands is gaining recognition on the national stage for its commitment to marine science education, the institution of higher learning announced this week. This summer, the UVI's Growing Research, Restoration, Outreach, and Education (GRROE)

USVI Mangroves Program sent a 14-member cohort of students, faculty, staff, and educators to the National Marine Educators Association (NMEA) Annual Conference in Lafayette, Louisiana.

The group represented a broad mix of the Virgin Islands' education community: four public school teachers, five graduate students, two undergraduate students, and three UVI faculty and staff. Their participation was supported by funding from the Schmidt Ocean Coalition, the U.S. National Science Foundation's Coastlines and People Strong Coasts project, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Environmental Literacy Program.

The NMEA conference is widely regarded as a premier event for marine, coastal, and aquatic education, attracting hundreds of formal and informal educators from across the country. Workshops, hands-on demonstrations, presentations, and networking sessions offer participants the opportunity to share ideas and strengthen teaching practices.

This year, the USVI cohort contributed significantly to the program, delivering three oral presentations on key local initiatives: the Mangroves in the Classroom program, the USVI Storm Strong program, and GRROE's broader efforts to promote mangrove research, restoration, outreach, and education throughout the Territory. Both Storm Strong and Mangroves in the Classroom emphasize place-based learning and hands-on activities. Students engage in hurricane preparedness, mangrove conservation, and restoration through field trips, classroom projects, and storytelling.

For local teachers, the conference was more than an academic exercise; it was a chance to grow professionally.

"Attending NMEA was truly an enriching experience, both personally and professionally. I was able to expand my understanding of coastal ecosystems, especially mangroves. Sessions were engaging and well organized by expert researchers who shared their data on coastal issues," said Aquellah Cantois, a secondary teacher at Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School on St. Thomas.

Ver Néle Callwood, a science teacher at Charlotte Amalie High School, also reflected on the benefits. "The NMEA was a very constructive professional development opportunity that left me with a wealth of new activities and lessons to implement in the upcoming school year," she said. "It was difficult to choose which session to attend, as all were highly interactive and informative."

For UVI students, the event offered both a professional milestone and personal inspiration.

"Being able to attend and present at NMEA through my work with the Grimes Lab was an exciting and inspirational experience—it was my first conference! I was able to share our work while also meeting and learning from so many other passionate marine educators and researchers," said Megan Anthony, a UVI undergraduate student.

Graduate student Sarai Hutchinson described the experience as transformative. "The NMEA conference was an incredible blend of academic learning and cultural discovery. I came away with connections that will shape my journey and open doors to future career opportunities," she said.

By presenting its work at a respected national forum, UVI underscored its leadership role in environmental and marine education. The GRROE USVI Mangroves Program not only connects local students, educators, and researchers with national networks but also prepares the next generation of environmental stewards.