

## **FKCC's Diving Program Obtains National Designation**



An FKCC student monitors the progress of coral restoration at Molasses Reef off Looe Key, as part of the Basic Research Diving course. Photo by: Doug Rudolph

KEY WEST, FL, March 24, 2011— Florida Keys Community College proudly announces its induction into the American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS). FKCC is only the second community college in America to be granted AAUS membership—and the only one in Florida. The designation means that now all scientific diving activities at the college's James E. Lockwood Jr. School of Diving and Underwater Technology will function under the standards and guidelines of the AAUS and will be overseen by an internal Dive Control Board comprised of college faculty and administrators. Organized in 1977, the Academy's primary role is to sanction and support scientific diving research programs, enabling scientists and students to operate under exemption from OSHA commercial diving regulations.

"We've been preparing for this for over a year," said Dr. Alex Brylske, FKCC Dive Research Program Coordinator and Diving Safety Officer. "This is the culmination of the collective efforts of many, and indeed a high honor for FKCC."

A significant benefit of Academy membership is reciprocity from other AAUS organizations when collaborating on research projects. FKCC diving and marine science students can now qualify to

work with major research universities, various aquaria throughout the United States, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and even the Smithsonian Institute.

“The affiliation opens up many new opportunities for internships for our students and enhances their prospects for employment after graduation,” said Dr. Patrick Rice, FKCC Dean of Marine Science and Technology. “The demand for AAUS divers is huge and the supply is limited.”

Students will be eligible to become FKCC/AAUS-Certified Scientific Divers after successful completion of Basic Research Diving and Diving Physiology and Emergency Medicine courses, in addition to passing a physical exam and obtaining CPR and oxygen administration certification. The college’s Diving Control Board will begin awarding certifications to qualifying students this semester—some of whom have already applied for summer internships with AAUS organizations such as the Mote Marine Laboratory.

AAUS membership will open doors to new projects and expand participation with current collaborations in the Keys. According to Rice, the most immediate ventures for the college will be to increase coral restoration and marine aquaculture activities.

“We’ll tighten our partnership with the Coral Restoration Foundation,” said Rice. “Our students have been taking classes and learning how to operate and maintain coral nurseries for ongoing coral restoration projects. Now graduates of those classes with the FKCC/AAUS certification can get jobs as scientific divers and be paid to do underwater research.”

According to Brylske, FKCC students will also now be able to dive alongside NOAA researchers and assist surveying the National Marine Sanctuary. Previously, FKCC students could only serve in non-diving roles as NOAA requires AAUS certification.

**About FKCC’s Marine Science and Diving programs:**

FKCC is the only college located within a National Marine Sanctuary and is just five miles from the only living barrier coral reef in North American. The college currently offers Associate in Science degrees in Marine Environmental Technology and Diving Business and Technology, in addition to five diving certificates that cover a range of disciplines within the diving industry. Certificate options include Fundamentals of Professional Diving, Commercial/Work Diving, Professional Research Diving, Professional Dive Instruction, and Diving Medical Technician. FKCC also offers industry certification through the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) and Divers Alert Network (DAN).

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