

# Creep into the DEEPEND

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## SEAMAIL™

FROM: DEEPEND Science Team  
TO: DEEPEND Virtual Team Leaders  
SUBJECT: Life at Sea

Howdy Students!

One of the amazing things about my work is the time I get to spend at sea. I go out to sea for two weeks at a time to get the shrimp I need to do my research. It takes a lot of planning. The DEEPEND team has to work together to make sure everything and everyone gets to the ship on time.

Before the cruise, the group decides who will go on the research cruise. We can't fit all 64 members of the DEEPEND Team on the ship. We need to have enough people with specialties in each animal group: Tam Fish, Team Crustacean, and Team Cephalopod. Plus others like scientists from Team Acoustics and Team Optics. Once it's decided who is going, each Team team figures out what they will need to bring to accomplish their goals onboard the ship.

We pack and bring everything to the ship. Once we get to the ship, the crew helps us get everything on board. Some of our equipment is so big, we need a small crane to get it on the ship! While the crew helps to get these things onto the ship, the rest of us unpack all the microscopes, bottles, forceps, and other lab supplies. We have to make sure things are well secured. In the harbor the water is very calm, but when we leave the harbor the ocean can get rough. The rocking of the ship can toss our expensive equipment off of the counters and onto the floor. We duct tape microscopes to shelves and use bungee cords to keep boxes in place.

After the lab is set up, we can get settled in our bunks. Every room has a bunk bed, so everyone has a roommate. We make our beds and put our things away. We have to bring all the sorts of things you need to bring when going on any long trip; we will be on the ship for two weeks before returning to land. If you forget toothpaste, there is no place to buy it at sea!

When everything and everyone is on board, the ship leaves the harbor and heads for open water. This usually happens very late – sometimes as late as midnight. It can take twelve hours to “steam” or travel to the first collection site. The first day at sea, we wake up and eat breakfast. The ship has a kitchen and dining area and a cook who makes all of our meals. After breakfast, the DEEPEND team meets to make sure everyone understands their role on the research cruise. We go over any problems we encountered on the last cruise and discuss any changes we want to make to the pre-cruise plan.

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At every collection site, we put a big net into the water and trawl once around noon and once around midnight. Because the net needs to go very deep (1500 m), it takes about 3 hours to go down and three hours to come back up. When the net comes up, we put every animal we collected in a big sorting tray and sort them by main group: fish, crustacean, or cephalopods. Then, every team gets to work on their group. I work on crustaceans with Dr. Heather Bracken-Grissom and Dr. Tamara Frank. We sort the crustaceans into species and label them with species name and collection site. Everything we pull from the water is brought back to shore for us to study.

Because of the sampling schedule, every day feels like two days. We wake up very early, at 3 a.m. to sort the animals. When we finish, we eat breakfast and put the nets back in the water. Many of us go take naps in between trawls, getting up again at 3 p.m.

The research cruise is a lot of fun, but also a lot of work. Some people deal with motion sickness. When we get back to shore, we are all so used to walking around a rocking boat, we have “dock rock”. Dock rock means it feels like the land is rocking beneath your feet and it makes it feel awkward to walk. It can take several hours for dock rock to go away!

Needless to say, after all the work we do at crazy hours every day for two weeks, when we get back to shore, everyone is exhausted! But in some ways, the work is just beginning! The animals we collected are brought back to our labs in Texas and Florida and we all get to work finding out what we can learn about the Gulf of Mexico.

Well Team, I have to get back to my lab work. I'll keep you updated on what I find. I'm so glad to know so many students are interested in the Gulf of Mexico and care about keeping it healthy!

*Laura*

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Creep into the DEEPEND Mission

