

To the Roof!
Learning by Observing Oswego's Weather

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One of the best ways to learn about something is to experience it. That has been the approach of the meteorology faculty at SUNY Oswego. The campus is located on the Lake Ontario shoreline, where many interesting weather phenomena occur. These include lake-effect clouds and precipitation, lightning within lake-effect storms, waterspouts, strong windstorms and high waves, and thunderstorms. At least once a week we bring students up to the roof of Piez Hall to observe and learn from our atmosphere. Many students, both majors and non-majors, have expressed greater interest and insight in learning about the weather from going on these minor field trips. Just this last semester several students from a "Weather Disasters" class watched as a waterspout formed just a couple hundred feet from the shore.

We have recently obtained a high-quality camera for our program. The photographs we have taken of sea smoke and lake-effect clouds have been used to greatly enhance the learning in our courses. Over 200 detailed pictures were captured of waterspouts that formed on 21 September 2006. We were able to capture waves propagating vertically along the edges of the spout, something we've never observed before. Several pictures and video of this event will be shown. Many of these observations have research implications and will serve as a catalyst for many of our student projects.

We plan to take this concept of "learning by observing" to the next level this summer. SUNY Oswego will be offering a Storm Forecasting and Observation Program open to any college student in the country. The first week of this program will entail comprehensive learning about the mechanisms that form thunderstorms and how to forecast them through lecture, videos, and case exercises. The last two weeks we will study actual storms in Tornado Alley where each day we will analyze data (e.g., maps, soundings), conduct forecast discussions, observe storms, and then compare our forecasts to what actually happened. Once again, the best way for someone to learn about the atmosphere is by being in the meteorologist's laboratory: outside!