

OVERVIEW

The [Turkana Basin Institute](#) (TBI) supports scientific research in remote northern Kenya (Turkana Basin), and is well established as a leading research institute for paleosciences in Kenya attracting investigators from around the world. Stony Brook University (SBU) is the academic home and one of the administrative bases for TBI, which was founded by Richard Leakey in 2005. Historically, SBU serves as home for Turkana Basin faculty, research affiliates, post-doctoral fellows, and graduate and undergraduate students, working across departments such as Anthropology, Geosciences, Ecology and Evolution, Anatomical Sciences, as well as the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences. In the past few years, TBI has garnered increased attention from scholars interested in pursuing research in the Turkana Basin, expanding TBI's scientific focus to include extreme heat, human health and climate change adaptation, the ecological impacts of global warming, and astronomy.

In January 2024, SBU Executive Vice President and Provost Carl Lejuez collaborated with TBI Director Emeritus Lawrence Martin and TBI Director Dino Martins to lead a trip to the Turkana Basin, which included representatives from various SBU units. An overarching goal of the trip was to inspire and cultivate new, creative, and collaborative research and education initiatives focused on the Turkana Basin. Deans and faculty from SBU, including early career researchers, joined the trip from the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Business, the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, the School of Communication and Journalism, the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, the Renaissance School of Medicine, and the Program in Public Health. The group visited both TBI-Turkwel and TBI-Ileret research field stations, the surrounding communities, and world famous fossil sites related to human evolution. As summarized in a [subsequent Stony Brook News article about the trip](#), “this strategic move reinforces the university’s dedication to interdisciplinary research and also positions the TBI at the forefront of global scientific exploration and educational outreach.” In January 2025, the Simons STEM Scholars program leadership and its first cohort of students (class “S1”), majoring in fields such as Applied Math, Biochemistry, Sociology, Psychology, and Marine Vertebrate Paleontology, among others, joined TBI Director Dino Martins and proposal organizers Drs. Russo, Henkes, and Frouin for a one month field excursion in the Turkana Basin. All the while, TBI semester abroad and summer field programs regularly host SBU students at TBI field stations.

The 2025 TBI Research and Education Conference marks 20 years since Richard Leakey presented SBU with his idea for an institute that provides permanent infrastructure to facilitate research in remote northern Kenya. This conference will showcase research from our current faculty, while also providing an environment for interested faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, and administrators to learn about TBI’s infrastructure and to seed new projects, field school opportunities, and grant proposals. This will leverage one of SBU’s most unique research centers to advance university scholarship. Specifically, this conference will provide an on-campus opportunity to reignite recent conversations, establish new collaborative relationships, initiate topical workshops and develop grant proposal ideas among faculty and students from across academic units on both east and west campuses. Invited TBI faculty presenters will include a keynote address from TBI Director and SoMAS faculty Dino Martins, as well as Carrie Mongle and Elisabeth Hildebrand from the Department of Anthropology, Tara Smiley from the Department Ecology and Evolution, and Gregory Henkes and Marine Frouin from the Department of Geosciences. Additional invitations will be extended to SBU faculty who have more recently developed research project ideas, including Shobana Shankar from the Department of History, as well as the chairs, and graduate and undergraduate students of TBI SBU faculty home departments. With this event, we also wish to reconnect with the Simons STEM Scholars S1 cohort and invite the next “S2” cohort, who will join TBI SBU faculty for another field season in January 2026 for a preview of Turkana Basin field research. A total of 100 participants are expected.