

Student, prof. further Chinese botany studies

by Walter Baumann - Wednesday, December 17, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1571/student-prof-further-chinese-botany-studies/>

A professor and biology student worked at the renowned Missouri Botanical Garden this July, identifying and cataloging hundreds of plant species for the groundbreaking Flora of China project.

Senior Laura Klein, of Neenah, accompanied Thomas Lammers, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh herbarium curator, for a month of research at the garden, where they took part in the cataloging of multiple genera of Chinese plant life. Lammers was selected because of his extensive knowledge of the flowering plants in the family Campanulaceae, or bellflowers.

“Coming into the program, I didn’t know much about taxonomy, but this certainly was a crash course,” Klein said. “It was amazing how immersing myself in it helped me to pick it up.”

Lammers used his expertise to identify each plant, and then helped Klein to check plant shapes and lengths against their written characteristics.

“We pored over descriptions of the plants — comparing them with dried samples of the plants themselves — that had been translated from the original Chinese,” Klein said. “We had to make sure the plants and their descriptions matched up.”

To minimize costs, Klein and Lammers stayed in apartments on the garden grounds, directly between the city garden and research building.

“It was such a gorgeous place to stay,” Klein said. “We were always surrounded by beautiful flowers and plants.”

Klein described her experience as an opportunity, one that she believes will dramatically improve her marketability as a professional.

“I got to meet a lot of taxonomists from all over the world at the botanical garden,” Klein said. “This has changed what I want to do and has given me the opportunity to do it.”

Lammers was thrilled with the progress made during the month-long research trip — both in the project and the growth of his student.

“She was incredibly enthusiastic,” Lammers said. “She always asked thoughtful questions and always displayed genuine interest and insight.”

Both plan on returning in January to complete the project and for a small side project with the flora of Paraguay. Lammers looks forward to the chance to focus on research and to enjoy a “mini-sabbatical.”

Lammers hopes this research will help other students to realize the quality of a UW Oshkosh education.

“Part of my goal in undertaking this project was to open the eyes of our students to the big bold world out there,” Lammers said. “You don’t have to be at an Ivy League school to get a world-class education from professors who are international scholars and first-rate teachers.”