



News Release

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Dresden Native Captures Top Student Presentation Honor at Research Conference

KEUKA PARK, N.Y.—If Matt Beckwith proved one thing at the recent Finger Lakes Research Conference it was bigger doesn't always equate to better.

The senior environmental science major out-performed 16 undergraduate and graduate students representing such large-enrollment institutions as Cornell, Syracuse, and SUNY Buffalo to capture the best student presentation award. The conference was held at the Finger Lakes Institute (FLI) on the Hobart and William Smith Colleges campus.

Beckwith was honored for his presentation on “Nutrient Addition Effects on Phytoplankton Growth Rates in Keuka Lake.”



He was the only undergraduate student to deliver a verbal presentation; the others produced posters to explain their research.

“Verbal presentations are more difficult, but I encouraged Matt to do it,” said Assistant Professor of Biology and Environmental Science Tim Sellers. “Given his background, I was confident he would do a great job and he did.”

“It was more of a challenge, but in research I believe it's important to convey what you do to others,” said Beckwith, a native of Dresden.

Beckwith's presentation earned accolades outside of Keuka Park as well.

Neil Laird, assistant professor of geoscience at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, said Beckwith “provided a good introduction and background for his project, clearly explained his procedure and results, had a well-structured presentation, and responded well to questions he received.”

Beckwith's presentation was based on the Field Period he conducted with Sellers last summer under the umbrella of the College's new aquatic research program that Sellers developed.

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“We are investigating two potential threats to Keuka Lake: nutrient loading and invasive species, such as zebra mussels,” explained Sellers.

Last summer, the teacher and student focused on the former, examining the effects agricultural practices (runoff of animal waste and fertilizers) might have on the health of the lake.

“Initially, we looked at how the algae population in the water responded to two common elements found in fertilizers: nitrogen and phosphorous,” said Beckwith, who added that the research experience he has garnered at Keuka has prepared him well to pursue graduate study in aquatic ecology next year.

“Working with Dr. Sellers and presenting at the Finger Lakes Research Conference has been invaluable. You can’t replicate what I’ve learned in the field in the classroom.”

Sellers contends that the experience garnered by Beckwith offers further proof why Keuka College is the national leader in experiential, hands-on learning.

“It demonstrates the value of experiential education and active learning,” said Sellers. “We are not trying to replicate what others did. This is novel research.”

Beckwith, who will continue to conduct research with Sellers via his senior research project, is also developing a poster presentation for the annual meeting of the Rochester Academy of Science Nov. 5.

FLI is a world-class research and education center initiated and operated by Hobart and William Smith Colleges. One goal of the conference, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation of Ithaca, was to highlight all aspects of Finger Lakes research.

In addition to Keuka, Cornell, Syracuse and Buffalo, students from Hobart and William Smith, SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, SUNY Brockport, SUNY Binghamton, RIT, and Hartwick presented at the conference.

