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OUACHITA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY



NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita faculty Plymale and Reyna incorporate published work into biology courses

By Lauren Snow

March 30, 2015

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Dr. Ruth Plymale and Dr. Nathan Reyna, biology faculty at Ouachita Baptist University, contributed research to an article recently published in *PLOS ONE*, an international, peer-reviewed journal featuring primary research in the sciences.

The article, “Comparative Genomics of Cluster O Mycobacteriophages,” compares DNA of viruses to see how and why they react the way they do. More than 50 scientists from universities across the U.S. and South Africa contributed research to the project, with each university analyzing certain aspects of each virus separately. The article brought their findings together to compare the reactions.

Reyna described the experience as “looking at different verse translations of the Bible,” he said. “Our job was to analyze verses, or viruses, to see how it was written and see how similar or different their punctuation or grammar was side by side.”

Plymale and Reyna completed their research for the article at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and continue similar research with students on Ouachita’s campus. Ouachita was invited in 2011 to join the HHMI’s Science Education Alliance PHAGES project, which gives freshman undergraduate students the opportunity to complete hands-on research and contribute to the field of genomics. Ouachita was one of 12 universities nation-wide to be selected for the program that year and is the only school in Arkansas to be chosen to participate to date.

Dr. Tim Knight, dean of Ouachita’s Patterson School of Natural Sciences, said he views these research-driven classes as “cutting-edge courses” that provide great value to Ouachita students. Plymale also affirmed the value of the program, saying, “The students are learning how to manage the information they find, which is a skill that will be useful to them and to us in the future.”

“I believe Ouachita has a better program than anybody else in the state as far as research experience for undergraduates, and it’s because the faculty are willing to help the students succeed every day,” Knight added. “I have no doubt that we are providing a better education, especially with biology, and that students are leaving far better prepared than they were 10 years ago.”

Plymale, assistant professor of biology, joined the Ouachita faculty in 2009 and currently researches the environmental influences on biofilm formation. She earned her Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University and her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Arkansas.

Reyna, associate professor of biology, joined the Ouachita faculty in 2008 and is researching plant signal transduction in relation to biotic and abiotic stress. He earned his Ph.D. and master’s degrees from the University of Arkansas and his Bachelor of Science degree from College of the Ozarks.

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