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## Ouachita student research published in “eLife” science journal

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**OUACHITA**  
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**NEWS**

For Immediate Release

**Ouachita student research published in “eLife” science journal**

*By McKenzie Cranford*

May 9, 2015

For more information, contact OBU’s news bureau at [newsbureau@obu.edu](mailto:newsbureau@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – More than 60 Ouachita Baptist University biology students conducted research over the past four years that has been published in *eLife*, an international science journal. The research was conducted as part of a program known as SEA-PHAGES (Science Education Alliance-Phage Hunters Advancing Genomics and Evolutionary Science). Undergraduate students from several universities contributed to the phage discovery and sequencing project and are listed as supplemental authors in the *eLife* publication.

“As a SEA-PHAGES school, we participate with a network of colleges and universities to offer an independent guided research experience to our students,” explained Dr. Ruth Plymale, assistant professor of biology at OBU. “This research experience provides our students with a sense of ownership and confidence as they discover a new mycobacteriophage and learn characteristics about their phage that no one else knows.”

As a student finds and characterizes a mycobacteriophage, that phage’s information is recorded on a national database. Students and faculty can use this deposited information to compare and contrast large numbers of mycobacteriophages, looking for large-scale patterns and overall relationships. After leaders of the SEA-PHAGES program analyze the results, the findings are reported in *eLife*.

“College is often seen as a way to learn content and that will allow you to be a professional in the future,” said Dr. Nathan Reyna, associate professor of biology at OBU. “However, we have changed this approach and are now teaching students how to be a scientist by actually working as a scientist in their classes.”

John Givler, a senior biology major from Monroe, La., is one of the students who participated in the research. “This experience was the first time that I felt like I contributed to the world of science instead of just learning about it,” he said. “Learning techniques and information alongside personal research and discovery was an amazing opportunity as an undergraduate.”

“I am very proud of our students and of Ouachita,” Reyna added. “The whole concept of how we are now doing labs is unique, and our students have adjusted well and succeeded beyond my expectations. Additionally, the administration in the department, including Dr. Tim Knight and Dr. Lori Hensley, has been highly supportive of this project.”

For more information about the SEA-PHAGES program, contact Dr. Ruth Plymale at [plymaler@obu.edu](mailto:plymaler@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5081 or Dr. Nathan Reyna at [reynan@obu.edu](mailto:reynan@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5240.