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Community

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Mount Allison University student shines during recent Geosciences Conference

Fourth-year environmental studies student Lanna Campbell was one of the top three prize winners for student presentations of research at the 32nd annual meeting of the Atlantic Geoscience Society at Acadia University on Feb. 4 and 5.

The New Richmond, Que. native presented her work on old-growth forests and received the runner-up prize in front of the largest crowd of delegates ever recorded at the conference. She also was part of the largest group of PhD, Master's and undergraduate students ever to vie for the presentation awards.

"My research is the first of this type in Atlantic Canada and that is the message I delivered to the scientific community at the conference," Campbell said.

She presented work that has consumed her last two summers. Campbell traveled to western Newfoundland in the summer of 2004 and to the Cape Breton Highlands in the summer of 2005 to examine some of the few remnants of old growth forest left in Atlantic Canada. Her aim was to better understand the forest's life cycle by examining what happens after a tree dies. She received grants from the Royal Canadian Geographic Society each summer to do her research.

Campbell was part of a group of students from the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Lab (MAD Lab) who presented papers. These included biology student Christine Robichaud of Dieppe; geography and environmental studies student Ben Phillips of Moncton; and geography student Nigel Selig of Bridgewater, N.S.

"Many people walk through a forest hardly noticing the wood they step over that is slowly

rotting on the ground, but I walk through and see these stumps as important habitat for a multitude of plants and animals," said Campbell. "My research in the MAD Lab has tried to put a time frame on how slowly these trees are rotting, and in essence, how long they are providing a source of nutrients and a habitat for plants and animals."

By putting a time frame on this slow decomposition, Campbell hopes to help managers rethink their ideas of old-growth forest management.

"I feel that if a tree naturally grows and dies in a 200-year period, and then takes another 100 years to decompose, the natural cycle of the tree should be looked at as the longer time frame of 300 years, not the shorter 200-year period," explained Campbell.

Mount Allison geography and environmental studies chair Dr. Peter Ennals said that his department has been watching Lanna progressively build a sophisticated research project over the past few years and is very excited that she has finally received the kind of public recognition that she deserves.

"We are all very proud of her accomplishment, and the attention she has brought to the quality of research that is capable from our undergraduate students here at Mount Allison."

The Atlantic Geosciences Society is made up primarily of geologists and earth scientists from across Atlantic Canada. The attendees of the conference learned about the latest research from approximately 120 presentations from across Atlantic Canada, 40 of which were delivered by students.



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