



## The Magruder Menagerie

### Students stuff specimens, care for reptiles to fulfill scholarship hours

BY VALERIE SPENCER  
Staff Reporter

Fulfilling scholarship hours can be as fun as sorting through thousands of dead mammals, if a student is lucky.

Beginning sophomore year, students receiving \$750 or more in University scholarships must complete 60 hours of approved work per semester to renew their scholarships. However, students can find countless ways to satisfy that time commitment. One way is to volunteer in the various labs, museums and collections in Magruder Hall.

Junior Erin Gill prepares animal specimens for display in the mammal museum in Magruder Hall. Gill said her job is very interesting and presents different opportunities and experiences.

"I enjoy the fact that I never know exactly what I'm going to get when I come in," Gill said. "You open up the freezer and it's like, 'What do I want to work on today?' So I've done a mole or two, a squirrel that I collected myself off the street, off of Normal Street, that had recently been hit by a car."

She said the work isn't always fun, though. Gill said she tries to avoid working on certain specimens she called "nasties."

"It's kind of your last resort thing when there's nothing good to work on in the freezer, but you have to get your hours in," Gill said. "They're basically specimens that were found in a flood plain after a flood and then frozen, so they're waterlogged and really disgusting and gross, and you really don't want to work on [them]."

Nonetheless, Gill said most specimens she deals with are in good condition, much like the frogs or cats dissected in biology classes, and that she enjoys her work.

"It's just getting to say that I do something weird, is really kind of cool," Gill said.

Scott Burt, associate professor of biology and biology department chairman, said he's had students working in the mammal museum, which he curates, to complete scholarship hours for the past several years. Burt said the collection has about 5,000 different specimens, including skins and skeletons.

"Whereas librarians collect books and information, I collect mammals and information associated with them," Burt said. "That information can be in the form of where the animal was collected, when the animal was collected, the size of it — you name it. It's not just the animal itself but the data associated with it."

Scholarship-hour students who work in the mammal museum receive special training in specimen preparation, Burt said.

"I'll train them to basically stuff the animal with cotton, prepare the skeleton in a way that is acceptable by the scientific community, and those specimens are what comprise the collection," Burt said. "So teaching students how to prepare vouchers has been a big part of what students have used for scholarship hours."

Burt said the specimens go through several important steps before being placed in the collection, but not all of them are appealing to everyone.

"There's a colony of dermestid beetles that are quite common worldwide, ... and these beetles, as grotesque as it may sound, actually eat the flesh off the skeleton, so we end up with nice clean skeletons," Burt said. "And then we match the skeletons up with the skins. And I currently have a scholarship-hour student who's responsible for maintaining and managing that beetle colony."

Burt said scholarship students are responsible for much of the specimen preparation, like matching parts of the animal after they have been separated, organizing them in a meaningful way and assigning them a permanent Truman ID number.

"All of those major steps, from specimen preparation to cataloging that specimen to getting it installed in the collection, that's really largely been done by scholarship-hour students," Burt said.

Senior Katie Neville also works in Magruder Hall but gets to work with live animals like snakes and lizards in the herpetology lab. Neville said she has been working there since her junior year and likes taking care of the animals.

"I know a lot of people don't like snakes and stuff like that, but I tend to like the ones that nobody else really likes," Neville said. "There's a lizard in the lab that's really mean, and no one ever gets it out or anything, and it's bitten me twice, and I still play with it every day."

Neville said a trickier part of her job includes trying to find the animals that might have escaped from their cages. While changing the water, a few frogs once managed to break loose from Neville's care, she said.

"They kept escaping, and so I was chasing around the lab for them," she said. "One got under the refrigerator, and I couldn't get it out. ... But I heard the next day it was in the bucket of water we keep in the lab, so it found its way out."

Burt said he thinks students are attracted to these alternative jobs because they offer more excitement than typical scholarship jobs.

"[They may have] an interest in doing a scholarship job that's maybe a little interesting, that's not just sitting at a desk but actually doing something that's kind of different and unique and novel," Burt said. "And of course what I just described is pretty bizarre when you think about skinning mammals for your scholarship hours."



ABOVE Senior sociology and anthropology major Katie Neville volunteers at the herpetology lab in Magruder Hall three days a week. Oliver, a prehensile skink, is fairly temperamental and has bitten Katie twice. Despite the fact that nobody likes Oliver, Neville said she has taken him under her wing.



ABOVE AND RIGHT Neville holds Ernie the bearded dragon. Neville said she likes working with the many different animals in the herpetology lab.



Photos by Phil Jarrett, design by Jackson Groves and Erin Eisenbath/Index

<p><b>Around The Ville</b></p> <p><b>Twister</b></p> <p>Help raise money for Alzheimer's Disease research and gather a team of two to compete in the ultimate Twister tournament.</p> <p><b>8:30 p.m. to 11 p.m.</b> Wednesday Sub Down Under \$6 per team</p>	<p><b>Learn Hebrew</b></p> <p>Study the basics of the Hebrew with a lesson on the alphabet, small words and sounds. Snacks and a break for lunch included.</p> <p><b>10 a.m. to 5 p.m.</b> Sunday Baldwin 252 RSVP to hillel@truman.edu</p>	<p><b>Dance Party</b></p> <p>Bring friends and your dancin' shoes to Right, Right Records for a night full of good music and good times.</p> <p><b>9 p.m. Friday</b> Right, Right Records 208 S. Main St. \$3</p>
--	---	---