



• The Daily Beacon

University of Tennessee professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, Joe Williams, was named in the Top 100 Science Stories of 2008 by Discover Magazine for one of his research articles.

Professor's research receives honor

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Joe Williams, an assistant professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, has received national attention for his research article about the evolutionary diversity of flowers, which was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences in July. The article has recently been named one of the Top 100 science stories of 2008 by Discover Magazine.

Many years of hard work by Williams have gone into the recognized article.

"I started collecting data from the literature in 1999," Williams said, regarding his research. "Once I really focused in on this project, it took me two years to complete."

He was not inexperienced in studying flowers, though. He has researched them since 1993, when he was completing his Master's degree on flowering in oak trees.

In the article, Williams explains that flowering plants, or angiosperms, have become incredibly diverse because of their ability to quickly and easily transport sperm from pollen grain to egg cell. The research explains why those specific

plants are more diverse than cone-bearing gymnosperms, like pines.

Williams' findings are important in the field because diversity in angiosperms have baffled scientists for over 150 years.

Although the effect on the science community is unpredictable, Williams explained that the article "will cause people to think more about how development and growth evolves."

He also said that his work will interest any biologists who study plant cell walls, as his work suggests that the way a pollen tube builds its walls affects its performance.

The research article has warranted both national and international attention in the scientific community. Internationally, he has submitted an article to an individual in China and recently gave an invited presentation in Brasilia, Brazil.

In May, Williams will be traveling to Zurich and Lausanne, Switzerland to present his findings. He has already been to Arizona and will also be traveling to Duke and Tennessee State University in March.

The faculty at UT shares pride in Williams' achievement.

"Dr. Williams has demonstrated that he has what it takes to be the type of leading scientific investigator that UT aspires to have as part of our faculty," Ed Schilling, a fellow professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, said.

Schilling attributes this success to the fact that Williams has managed to combine a creative approach to the subject along with a meticulously careful technique in the laboratory.

As for future endeavors, Williams has many plans to continue with his travels, study and research.

"My interests are quite broad," Williams said.

He plans to focus his most recent studies on groups of flowering plants inferred to have ancient features. Williams will also continue to travel around the world studying these living fossils in their natural habitat, while also bringing them home to UT to be grown and studied year round. Williams plans to study water lilies in the UT greenhouse while also participating on a project in Queensland, Australia.