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Barcode of Life

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SACKVILLE, NB — What's the most effective way to categorize all living species? This sounds like a daunting task but Mount Allison researchers are part of a group who are working on the answer to this question. Biology professors Margaret Beaton and Irena Kaczmarek, along with several Mount Allison master's students, are part of the Canadian Barcode of Life Network, a network

that seeks to assemble barcodes for the genetic (DNA) identification of all organisms in Canada.

The Canadian Barcode of Life Network is part of a larger international consortium and includes researchers from universities and institutions across the country. The network is the first of its kind, an enterprise dedicated to barcoding all biodiversity within a nation's boundaries. The network was established in 2003 at the University of Guelph by Dr. Paul Hebert. The project has received funding from a number of sources including the Canada Foundation for Innovation/Ontario Innovation Trust, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and Genome Canada. A substantial portion of two of the major grants received is being used to support and train post-doctoral fellows, graduate, and undergraduate students.

Dr. Margaret Beaton, who has worked with Hebert in the past, says, "The concept is to identify a unique molecular label for each species of life. Then, in the future, the species could be identified and monitored based on a standard molecular analysis. Right now there's a lot of being done to barcode animals and fish but the Network is being expanded to include plants, microorganisms, and fungi."

Dr. Irena Kaczmarek says, "At Mount Allison, we have a number of our graduate and undergraduate students working on the project. It's a great opportunity for them to work with researchers across the country and gain valuable insight in to the barcoding process. It is very important to initially correctly identify species that are barcoded (not an easy task in case of many microorganisms) because we expect that barcodes will be used in the future by researchers who do not know how to identify species using classical methods. I'm looking forward to seeing how this project progresses."

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Graduate student Jillian Ferrell of Dartmouth, who has been studying with Beaton and Kaczmarska says, "Working as part of the Network has provided me with contacts across the country and allowed me to be part of a big, active research project." Master's student Nandini Bhogar of India agrees. She says, "I'm excited to be involved in such a big project. It's great to be working in such a small group here at Mount A but to also have access to resources across the country through the Network." Releases

Beaton and Kaczmarska's contributions to the Barcode Network are in the area of microorganism species. The Beaton lab is focusing on dinoflagellates, marine-based single-celled algae, which are known to produce toxins. Kaczmarska is an expert in diatoms, small single-celled algae, which live in oceans, lakes, rivers, and mudflats worldwide. Both professors are conducting their barcoding research of different microorganism species in the Bay of Fundy region.

For more information on the Canadian Barcode of Life Network, please visit www.bolnet.ca.

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Photo caption (l-r): Master's students Jillian Ferrell and Nandini Bhogar (front) in the lab with biology professors Irena Kaczmarska and Margaret Beaton.

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