

# THE LANGUAGE OF DISCOVERY

THE UNIVERSITY'S COLLABORATIVE ENVIRONMENT PROVIDES SUPPORT FOR ALL.

BY SUZANNE ROBICHEAU

At first glance, it appears that Amberlin Hines is assessing the fare at a seafood buffet. On closer inspection, there's more to Hines—and to the mussel she's holding—than meets the eye.

“Amberlin is a student from Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, a liberal arts university for the deaf,” says Dr. Linda Campbell, an environmental scientist at Saint Mary's University. “She spent the summer working with me on an experiment to compare the nitrogen and phosphorus excretion rates of Eastern *Elliptio* mussels and invasive Chinese mystery snails.”

Dr. Campbell always enjoys mentoring promising students and working with them to solve important environmental problems. As a deaf professor in a hearing university, she found it especially enjoyable to communicate with Hines using American Sign Language (ASL).

“Both Amberlin and I use ASL as our preferred language,” says Campbell, “so it became our primary mode of communication. It was wonderful to be able to carry out an engaged, scientific discussion in ASL with both Amberlin and her co-supervisor, Dr. Caroline Solomon, an aquatic environment researcher at Gallaudet.”

As a sixth-generation deaf person, Hines also appreciates the opportunity to communicate using ASL. “All the profs at my university sign,” she says, speaking through the Saint Mary's Faculty of Science staff interpreter. “It's easier to learn in my first language.”

Support from Saint Mary's also made it easier for Hines to learn and to immerse herself in the University community. Officially, she was a member of the Department of Environmental Science, but her research project also received considerable technical support from the Departments of Biology, Chemistry, and Geology.

“This kind of cross-department involvement,” says Campbell, “underscores one of Saint Mary's greatest assets: a collaborative and supportive environment for all researchers, including students.”

Funding for the research conducted by Campbell and Hines came through competitive research grants from



Dr. Linda Campbell (l) with Amberlin Hines, who spent the summer visiting from Washington and studying shellfish.

the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, and the Nova Scotia Research and Innovation Trust. Additional funds came through Dr. Caroline Solomon's research funding from Gallaudet University.

Amberlin Hines returned to Washington in August, taking with her the data she needs to continue her research at Gallaudet and the determination to solve the mystery of invasive mystery snails. “We don't know how they compare to native mussels in terms of the impact they have on water quality,” she explains. “It's important to determine the role played by both mussels and mystery snails in controlling the toxic algal blooms that threaten the health of humans and wildlife.”

Hines also returned home with fresh ideas to share with colleagues and memories of a friendly maritime campus where people went out of their way to make her feel welcome. “Everyone I met tried very hard to find ways to communicate with me,” she says. “When I'd tell people I'm deaf, they'd speak very clearly so I could lip read or pull out a phone to type me a message. Saint Mary's really lived up to its reputation as a friendly university.” ♦