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## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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July 9, 2014



Michael Finkler, professor of physiology, and intern Bel Da Silva examine a snapping turtle in Finkler's lab.

### Intern from Brazil assists with turtle research at IU Kokomo

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — In the darkened laboratory, Bel Da Silva carefully lifts an egg from the incubator, holding it in front of the room's single light source, which illuminates the turtle embryo inside the shell.

She turns the egg, noting developmental progress, before replacing it in the incubator and reaching for the next one.

This is exactly the kinds of hands-on research experience Da Silva, a native of Brazil, sought as part of her one-year Science Without Borders exchange program in the United States — and she found it at Indiana University Kokomo.

She assists Michael Finkler, professor of physiology, with his research of snapping turtle embryo development, helping him locate nests for egg collection, and then monitoring progress of the developing turtles.

“This offers me a project with real experience in the field, not busywork,” said Da Silva. “I was surprised that a professor would have time to include an undergraduate student in his research.”

Finkler said IU Kokomo’s focus on the undergraduate experience, including research, made it possible for him to mentor Da Silva. He knows from personal experience how these kinds of opportunities make a difference for students.

“I had a really great mentor as I completed my undergraduate thesis, and that’s when research really clicked for me,” he said. “That’s why I’m a professor now, because of that mentoring. In Bel’s case, I also saw an opportunity to get experience working with an international student.”

Da Silva is a third-year student at Federal University of Amazonas in Brazil, studying biology. As part of the Science Without Borders program, she is attending University of Arizona as an exchange student. The program, which provides a full scholarship funded primarily by the Brazilian government, requires that she find an internship in a research lab or in industry for the summer. One of her professors in Brazil had worked with Finkler before, and recommended she contact him.

Finkler appreciates the assistance with his long-running snapping turtle research, studying how efficiently the turtles convert the contents of eggs into tissue. It involves hours of driving dusty side roads in southern Michigan, looking for signs of snapping turtle nests, tedious digging into the nests, and painstaking removal of eggs, which they transport back to Finkler’s lab to incubate and study.

Da Silva enjoys the process, and working with IU Kokomo students in the lab.

“It’s amazing to see the embryos grow inside the eggs,” she said. “I’m learning new techniques, like the biochemical analysis. I’m also learning what it’s like to be an American college student.”

Da Silva hopes IU Kokomo students will consider studying in Brazil as well, and would be happy to welcome them to her university.

She plans to pay the experience forward, and become a researcher and professor.

“I like the idea of research, and teaching,” she said. “It’s important that you give the knowledge you learned to someone else.”

Finkler said her experience in the United States, along with her excellent English, would help her gain admission to graduate programs. While she has benefitted from the experience, he said she’s also made researching a better experience for the IU Kokomo students in his lab.

“This is a great chance for them to learn some Latin American culture, along with research skills,” he said. “We have so few students here who come from South America. This really augers well for the growth of our campus, and our international exposure.”

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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