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An Oasis of Knowledge

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An Oasis of Knowledge



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The UNH Center for International Education Newsletter

Fall 2012

AN OASIS OF KNOWLEDGE



Athena Jennings presenting at Project SMART's closing ceremony

Athena Jennings must be driven four hours one way over narrow roads, which include unlit tarmac that crosses harsh, remote, and isolated desert landscapes, and descends for more than four thousand feet in altitude to reach the north shore of the Red Sea. Needless to say, such educational excursions are rare for this high school student from King's Academy in Madaba, Jordan, who maintains a passion for marine biology despite being raised in an arid homeland.

Jennings' science teacher, Mark Kibler, recognized the sincerity of her early interest and encouraged her to apply to UNH's Project SMART summer program for high school students seeking an academic challenge in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.

Over the past two decades, the students of Project SMART have benefitted from practicing science with peers who come from diverse backgrounds. Subhash Minocha, the program's co-founder and director, has worked to increase the attendance of students from all around the world – creating and fostering relationships with schools from as far west as Alaska and as far east as Greece and Turkey.

“Providing a forum for personal interaction and networking among students from diverse economic, racial, and geographic backgrounds is paramount to their becoming scientifically literate global citizens,” Minocha said.

Even though this was the first time Jennings and her family were apart for a full four weeks, her mother, Cheryl, took it in stride.

“I had confidence in the university and how things were done,” she said. “And I knew Athena was having a ball.”

In fact, Jennings had the opportunity to experience the complete opposite of her landscape at home.

“We went out to the Isles of Shoals one day and stayed overnight – collecting at night and in the morning,” Jennings said of the research she and her classmates conducted on the species, gender, and size of carapace of invasive and native crabs found in Sandpiper and Smith Coves. “I enjoyed being in an environment with lots of students focused on science.”

“Athena grew a lot. It was really stimulating for her to see how much is out there that can be explored,” according to Cheryl Jennings. “She can use this as a launching pad, and I think she will.” Jennings flew from Jordan with Mark Kibler to congratulate her daughter, her teachers and her classmates at the Project SMART program's closing ceremony.

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~ Contributed by Victoria Forester Courtland, College of Life Sciences & Agriculture (COLSA)

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223 Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824
tel: 603-862-2398 • fax: 603-862-0169
study.abroad@unh.edu • international.affairs@unh.edu