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Herbaria in Danger in the US

The Iowa Issue: Organismal and Environmental Biology

- Diana Horton, Director and Curator, University of Iowa Herbarium, University of Iowa

The University of Iowa Herbarium is one of the collections that presently is threatened with closure. The Friends of the University of Iowa Herbarium has an immediate request.

We solicit your support of our efforts to keep the Herbarium at the University of Iowa. Even if you have already written a letter, please take a few moments to sign our new online petition and forward the URL to anyone you think might be willing to sign. We are circulating this nationally and internationally in the taxonomic and collections communities in the hopes of generating a massive response that we could use to pressure university administrators who seem determined to proceed with a needless and senseless plan to divest the collection.

It has been suggested that the situation with the University of Iowa Herbarium is different from others where herbaria are being closed, because the University of Iowa collections will be transferred to Iowa State University. It is crucial for people to understand that, if the administration's plan is carried out, this Herbarium will be closed, and there will be far-reaching, long-term negative impacts for organismal and environmental biology at the University of Iowa (see below). Even though the collections will be accessible elsewhere, closure of this Herbarium will severely undermine organismal and environmental biology at this university. It is on this basis that we ask you to support our efforts and sign the petition.

<http://www.PetitionOnline.com/herbarui/petition.html>

If you have time to write a letter of support, please address it to:
University of Iowa President Skorton (david-skorton@uiowa.edu), and copy to me:
Diana Horton, Director and Curator, University of Iowa Herbarium
(diana-horton@uiowa.edu).

Undoubtedly, field investigations of plants in eastern Iowa, the region with the greatest biodiversity, will be greatly reduced, even though our work over the last 10-15 years demonstrates that there is a great deal still to be learned about plant distributions in this part of the state. The loss of the Herbarium also will compromise the quality of the educational experience for Liberal Arts students at the University of Iowa and it will seriously undermine the Green Track of the popular Environmental Sciences Program. Our outreach program, via presentations; tours for students from surrounding colleges and schools; assistance with identification; and the Herbarium web site, will cease. Overall, fewer people will learn about plants, collections-based research, the environment and conservation, and fewer will have ready access to a vital resource for assessing the environment. In short, the closure of the University of Iowa Herbarium will eliminate a centre for organismal and environmental studies, and reduce the resources dedicated to promoting these vital aspects of biology.

- Over the last ten years, more than 10 native species never before recorded from the state have been discovered in eastern Iowa by people using the Herbarium.
- Over the last ten years, 100 publications/reports/creative works and over 30 theses have been based on use of the Herbarium. Over the same 10-year period, class use of the Herbarium averaged over 300 students/year in 10-12 courses
- We have an active outreach program that includes presentations to conservation groups, schools and colleges, and the Herbarium web site averages over 4,000 Requests for Pages and over 1,000 Distinct Hosts Served monthly

LATEST NEWS:

On 29th February, our attorney sent a Cease and Desist letter to the Office of the University Counsel at Iowa State University, respectfully requesting that Iowa State University and its employees cease and desist from moving forward with either the packing or the removal of any Herbarium specimens.

At 4 PM on 1st March 2004, four people from Iowa State University, including Director Lynn Clark and Curator Deb Lewis, arrived at the University of Iowa Herbarium accompanied by University of Iowa Department of Biological Sciences Chair Jack Lilien, and three other Department of Biological Sciences faculty, Joseph Frankel, Gary Gussin and John Meninger.

When I informed Chair Lilien and Dr. Clark that, as Curator, I did not give them permission to access the Herbarium, Chair Lilien responded that he was giving the Iowa State people access. I explained to them that by accessing the Herbarium over my objections, they are violating standard Herbarium and Museum regulations. Chair Lilien said that he was giving them permission to pack the collection.

We have learned just now that the Iowa State people intend to work through the night and to transport the collections to Iowa State in the morning. Earlier, Dr. Clark told me that the collection would be packed beginning, March 1st and transported to Iowa State beginning March 15th. Phillip Jones, the Vice President for Student Services, and Marcus Mills, Senior Associate Counsel for the University of Iowa 'joined the crowd' of University of Iowa Administrators, and Charles Green, Director of Campus Security also is here.