

Faculty Profile of the Week

Dr. Shaun Sommerer: expert in crystallography

by Bridgette Jesek
Collegian Staff

Dr. Shaun Sommerer, assistant professor of chemistry, may have only been here for three years, but has a few new ideas and programs he would like to initiate at Behrend.

Born in Los Angeles but raised in western Minnesota, Sommerer obtained his bachelors degree at St. John's University and later moved on to the University of Florida for his Ph.D.

As a graduate student he was involved as a teaching assistant for his first and second year. Then he was promoted to instructor, lecturing on computers for chemistry majors.

"Actually I was an instructor at the University of Florida for two years, similar to the instructors here at Behrend except I wasn't involved in teaching labs and resuscitation groups," Sommerer explained.

Considering that he was pursuing a teaching career, this served as a big boost.

Within his Ph.D. research project he found what was going to remain interesting and exciting to him for years to come: the field of crystallography.

"We isolate single crystals of new seven coordinate compounds and they use x-ray defraction techniques to determine the three dimension geometry of the molecule structure," said Sommerer.

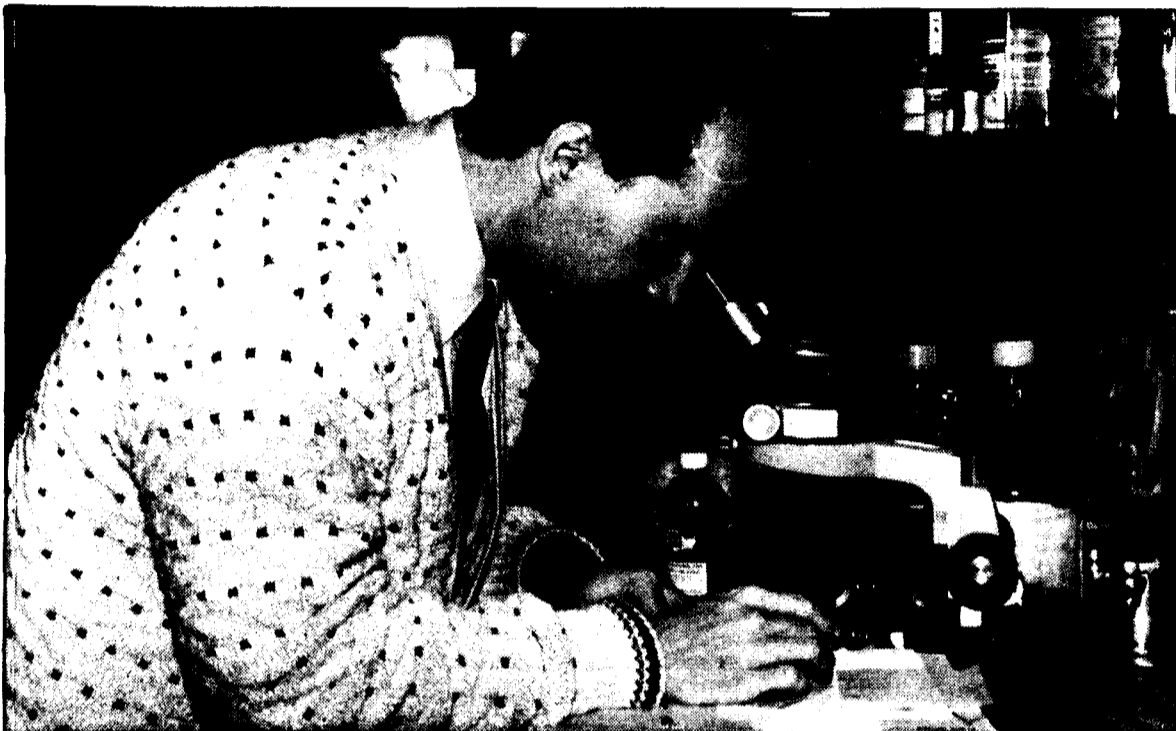
"This can then be turned, with the use of computers, into pictures where you can determine where the atoms sit relative to each other in the molecule on the atomic level."

These computer diagrams are useful. Sommerer teaches many undergraduate chemistry courses, but takes his expertise of crystallography to his undergraduate research projects in which crystals are currently being grown using different metals such as copper and cobalt.

Away from his work he enjoys tennis, classical music and tries to do much reading.

When asked what he looks most for in a student he said, "I look for curiosity. I find it exciting for students to come up and ask questions like 'Why is an orange orange?'" This agrees with Sommerer's own curiosity and love for nature.

Previously he was given the Most Demanding Faculty Award, which he accepted graciously.



Amel Balota/Assistant Photo Coordinator

FACULTY PROFILE OF THE WEEK: Dr. Shaun Sommerer, assistant professor of chemistry, is proud to have received the Most Demanding Faculty Award.

"Some students may look on the award as a bad thing, but I have found that students that have graduated in chemistry and other fields that have kept in touch have said that I push them hard but could have even pushed them some more," Sommerer said.

When giving advice to students Sommerer tells them "to push themselves because the world is much more competitive than they think."

His plans for the future of Behrend's chemistry program include the idea of combining a

chemistry and business degree.

"What you have to have is a good business school and good chemistry program, which I think we have both here," Sommerer believes. "The beauty of it is that they wouldn't have to add on new faculty or courses. It just needs repackaging."

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