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Students Keep 128-Year-Old 'Historical Climate Station' Tradition Alive

Jan-09-2009

Eastern Illinois University students are continuing a 128-year-old tradition of keeping Charleston's daily weather records for the nation's top official weather organizations.

The work, which relies on old-fashioned analog equipment and on-site observation, allows the Charleston station to retain its "historical climate station" status, while providing students with valuable experience they can't learn from a textbook.

"If you can engage the students in a hands-on experience in data collection, then they understand how important this data is," said Cameron Craig, the EIU geology/geography faculty member who oversees the online EIU WeatherCenter. "Now students have a reason to come in and participate in the daily functions of the WeatherCenter. Hopefully, they can use this foundation in their future."

The station is considered a "historical station" because the data has been collected at the same times (8 a.m. and 6 p.m.) daily, continuously, since Jan. 1, 1880. In the 1960s, the duties were taken over by Eastern's geology/geography department, using on-campus equipment. In the mid-1970s, the equipment was moved to the home of the department's chair, Dalias Price, and he handled the recordings nearly single-handedly for four decades.

In October 2008, the station returned to the EIU campus, where students collect important climate data for the National Weather Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The non-digital system uses an analog thermometer and precipitation gauge. Measurements are made by humans, not machines. "The real meat of observation is going out and looking at the thermometers with your eyes," Craig said.

Craig trains the students, who are then in charge of making the observations on their own. Twice each day, students visit the weather station to record their observations. They also share their reports with Craig via phone calls or text messages.

"I want to make sure that their data are accurate," Craig said, explaining he can use existing digital stations as a guide to double-check the observations. "We hope to continue the accurate observation for many years to come in honor of Dalias," Craig added.

For more details on the historical climate station, plus photos, please [click here](#).



EIU faculty member Cameron Craig, second from left, is pictured at Charleston's climate station with students and volunteers Rob Kennedy, Cameron Hopman and Kevin Jeanes.