Biologist receives Fulbright, researches algae

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Teresa Thiel, professor of biology at the University of Missouri–St. Louis, recently received the J. William Fulbright Leeds University Distinguished Chair Award. The Fulbright award will allow her to research the symbiotic relationship of cynobacteria with plants in order to produce hydrogen as an alternative energy source. She will conduct this research at the University of Leeds in England from January to June 2011.

For most of her career, the microbiologist has worked with cynobacteria – also known as algae – which are similar in many ways to plants, but can be grown easily in a petri dish.

“I’ve always worked with it as a free-living organism,” said Thiel, a University City, Mo., resident. “I’m looking forward to learning the techniques for growing it symbiotically with plants.”

Thiel will work with David Adams, senior lecturer in the Institute of Membrane and Systems Biology at the University of Leeds.

In addition to working in Adams’ lab, Thiel will teach an upper level seminar course on bioenergy at the university and lead workshops on the same subject teachers in the Leeds city schools.

Fulbright is the most widely recognized and prestigious international exchange program in the world, supported for more than half a century by the American people through an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress and by the people of partner nations. The research award program seeks out individuals of achievement and potential who will be outstanding cultural ambassadors for the U.S. and selects nominees through a nationwide open, merit-based competition.