

montage



From amphibians to anecdotes



RIGHT BRAIN OR LEFT BRAIN? Senior Rachel Mahan had a dilemma about whether to study science or creative writing.

Both of Mahan's parents work in conservation — her mom for the Missouri Department of Conservation and her dad

for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Science has been a major part of their lives, yet Mahan's parents also have supported her major in English.

"I came here because of the great creative writing program and MU's investments in the life sciences," she says.

Mahan's science savvy paid off in April 2006 when she earned a spot on the Posters on the Hill program for the national Council on Undergraduate Research. Her project was one of only 60 selected for display at a poster session on Capitol Hill for members of Congress — a way to demonstrate the value of supporting undergraduate research.

She presented her research on the habitat of tree frogs,

which are common in Missouri. Under the guidance of Raymond Semlitsch, MU Curators Professor of Biological Sciences, Mahan had marked, weighed and flushed the stomachs of frogs to study their diet and habitat use.

"No frogs were harmed in this research," she says of the stomach-flushing procedure that involved sticking a tube down a frog's throat and inserting water to eject the stomach contents.

Mahan's study helps determine how much forest habitat the tree frogs need and its importance — information that can guide conservation managers as they make informed decisions on preserving biodiversity and the environment. She found some frogs as far as 200 meters from their breeding pond, an indication they were using a lot more habitat than is generally protected.

Mahan is equally as comfortable with anecdotes as she is with amphibians. She spent summer 2006 working as a publishing intern with *The Missouri Review*.

With two degrees, in English and biological sciences, completed in December 2006, this right-brain, left-brain student is planning a career that combines both of her interests — science writing.