



Olga Ruiz Kopp (1959-Present)

Assistant Professor of Plant Molecular
Biology
Utah Valley State College

"It makes your life worthwhile when a student writes you to say they have succeeded." Olga Ruiz Kopp, 2006.

Overview

Dr. Olga Ruiz Kopp serves as an associate professor in the Department of Biology at Utah Valley State College. Throughout his career in as a plant biologist, she has researched topics such as gene expression in peanuts, micropropagation of plants, and analysis of endophytes in plants. Kopp's research includes, but is not exclusive to the following articles:

- Kopp, O.R., Samson, A., Wilson-Ashworth, H. 2007. Lab Manual. College Biology I. Biology 1610. Pearson Custom Publishing.
- Kopp, O. 2007. Historical review of unethical experimentation in humans. Ethics in the professions. Proceedings of the 8th annual Utah Valley State college conference by the faculty. Edited by Rick McDonald & David Yells. Pp.2-11
- Philippe Normand, Pascal Lapiere, Louis S. Tisa, Johann Peter Gogarten, Nicole Alloisio, Emilie Bagnarol, Carla A. Bassi, Alison M. Berry, Derek M. Bickhart, Nathalie Choisne, Arnaud Couloux, Benoit Cournoyer, Stephane Cruveiller, Vincent Daubin, Nadia Demange, Maria Pilar Francino, Eugene Goltsman, Ying Huang, Olga R. Kopp, Laurent Labarre, Alla Lapidus, Celine Lavire, Joelle Marechal, Michele Martinez, Juliana E. Mastrunzio, Beth C. Mullin, James Niemann, Pierre Pujic, Tania Rawnsley, Zoe Rouy, Chantal Schenowitz, Anita Sellstedt, Fernando Tavares, Jeffrey P. Tomkins, David Vallenet, Claudio Valverde, Luis G. Wall, Ying Wang, Claudine Medigue, and David R.Benson.Genome characteristics of facultatively symbiotic *Frankia* sp. strains reflect host range and host plant biogeography Genome Res., Jan 2007; 17: 7 – 15
- Ruhul Kuddus, Jonathan Oakes and Olga Kopp. 2006. Globalization and international molecular biotechnology transfer: Ethical, technological and organizational issues. Spheres of globalization. Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Utah Valley State College Conference by the Faculty.

This interview was conducted in 2015.

Early Life and Career

Olga Ruiz Kopp grew up in a small town in Colombia's Andes Mountains. Although today the town is touched by Colombia's longstanding civil conflict, Kopp remembers it as a peaceful place surrounded by coffee, sugar cane, fruit, and plantain crops. "I always liked plants since I was very young," she says. "I liked playing with the seeds. I used to take the black beans that my mother discarded because they had insects in them and plant them just to see them grow. I was also very interested in doing research." After working for six years to save money for undergraduate school, she attended the National University of Colombia in Bogota, where she studied biology and did her undergraduate thesis with plants. She also served as director of a Plant Tissue Culture Laboratory, where she micropropagated ornamental plants.

Education

Kopp wanted to continue studying and working with plants at the graduate level; however, after getting her undergraduate degree, she could not afford to attend graduate school in Colombia. Fortunately, she was offered a scholarship to study horticulture at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, an opportunity Kopp considered a dream come true. "I had always had a dream to study, but I couldn't do that in Colombia—I didn't have the money," she says. "When they offered me the chance to come here [the United States], I couldn't believe they were going to pay me to study. For that I am very thankful."

Importance of Mentorship to Career

Kopp found several important mentors while working on both her master's degree and doctorate at Tennessee. Her master's work with Dr. Robert Trigiano focused on the micro-propagation of plants: "By growing them in-vitro, you can select plants that are resistant to viruses, or that are difficult to breed under normal conditions," she explains. Kopp worked with Dr. Albert Von Arnim on her doctorate, where her dissertation focused on studying genes regulated by light using enhancer and gene trap analysis. She also did post-doctorate work at Tennessee, where she worked with Dr. Beth Mullin researching plant/microbe interactions.

Highlights

Since the fall of 2003, Kopp has been an assistant professor of biology at Utah Valley State College (UVSC). She continues to conduct research on flower development, plant/microbe interaction and micro-propagation, and has received a number of research grants. However, Kopp considers the ability to teach the highlight of her career. "My dream was to teach, and I really enjoy interacting with the students," she says. "I enjoy doing research with them, helping them get jobs or internships, or get into graduate or medical school. It makes your life worthwhile when a student writes to you to say they have succeeded." Kopp has also earned awards for her teaching, both as a Graduate instructor at Tennessee and a Professor at UVSC.

In addition to her research grants, Kopp has participated in a Summer Faculty Fellowship to expand participation of underrepresented minorities in Plant Genetics and Genomics. The fellowship, funded by the National Science Foundation, provided both Kopp and a student with funding to do a research project

at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. Kopp says she tries to mentor minority students at UVSC as much as possible by guiding them toward internships and research opportunities, but laments that she has not been very successful. "We have very few minority students at our school, and only now are we starting to see more," she says. "My project is to try to help them the best I can, but sometimes it's difficult to recruit them in our school."

Kopp has no regrets about her career choice; in fact, she cannot imagine doing anything else. "I love biology," she says. "I think knowing about nature is very important, and teaching students about nature and the environment they live in is very important. I really think it can make a difference in society." Kopp says the rewards of working in the field are not always evident, but they are there all the same. "If you work hard and enjoy what you do, you really can make a difference. If you work hard and study hard, it will pay off, and not just in money. The reward in seeing your students succeed...well, it changes your life."

For More Information

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