

Principia Professor Discusses Mammoth Discovery, Ongoing Dig Classes

by Dalton Brown, News Reporter
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ELSAH - Dr. Andrew Martin, an associate professor at Principia College in Elsah, recently discussed the discovery of mammoth remains on the college's campus and said visitors are welcome to watch as he and his students continue to dig for discoveries every Tuesday and Thursday this semester.

Martin said the discovery of the mammoth remains happened about a year ago and was “totally unexpected.” Facilities workers had been digging for an unrelated project when they suddenly came across a streak of something white in the ground. Facilities employee Mike Towell - who has some archeology knowledge - stopped the digging, inspected it closer, and called in an expert who identified the white streak as a tusk.

While the tusk itself was a fascinating discovery, Martin said there could be much more for his students to uncover this semester.

“ came down and they did a ground penetrating radar, and lo and behold, they found that there’s more material underneath, so we decided to do a class,” Martin said. “I teach archeology at the college, and so I thought it would be great to teach while excavating, and so we started that this semester.”

Those classes will consist of two three-hour courses each week on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Visitors are welcome to watch the students dig each Tuesday and Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m. Directions and/or a map can be requested from the guard at the college’s front gate, Martin said.

Students will dig 20 centimeters at a time and stop to photograph and record any findings along the way, Martin said. When it’s finally time to lift the tusk out of the ground, several measures will be put in place, and the utmost care will be taken, to keep the fragile bone from breaking.

Some of Martin’s students with computer science backgrounds are developing a website to document the class’s findings. History majors are digging through history books while archeology students dig through the ground, underscoring the multidisciplinary nature of the project.

“The great thing about this project is it’s so multidisciplinary. There are many skills and different disciplines that are involved in it,” Martin said. “They’re actually applying some skills that they’ve learned in other disciplines and bringing it to this project, which is great for me and for the project.”

Each class brings a new discovery and generates lots of enthusiasm for the students, Martin said.

“It’s fun to hear their enthusiasm about the project and to just see, every day, new things coming up out of the ground,” he said. “This last week, we found some bones which we didn’t know we would find, so that’s exciting.”

The full interview with Martin is available at the top of this story or on [RiverBender.com/video](https://riverbender.com/video).