



## Exploring Classification Systems

by: Alexandra Rosenberg

This semester I am taking Natural Sciences 2 with Stuart Patterson, and so far we've read quite a bit of Aristotle: *On the Soul*, *Classification of Animals* and *Generation of Animals*. Next we're to read some Lamarck.

I took Biology, several different Biology classes actually, in high school. I always just accepted what the textbook told me. Yes, you can classify animals and yes, there are specific ways of doing it. It may have been the only subject I did not read and think "why?". Now, reading Aristotle, I am wondering that. How did we get to this classification system? What makes this one, over any others, correct?



We approached these questions with a fastener lab last week. We split into groups and pairs and put on our classifying hats. My partner in crime was fellow first-year Cam(eron) Pilger, pictured, who was kind enough to allow me to document our trials and

tribulations in the classifying world. We were given a cup of fasteners (screws, nails, push-pins, etc) and had to decide how to separate them into groups using their characteristics. Cam and I were Hardware Dichotomists. We created a tree of sorts to classify all of the species of fasteners. We had to decide what was a large enough difference that it made one screw a different species from another, and not just a different race.

## Upcoming Events

### Shimer Assembly Meeting

2/7/2010 4:00 PM

As members of the larger Shimer community, Alumni are invited to participate as non-voting members of the Assembly.

### Montaigne Scholarship Competition Weekend

2/13/2010

Prospective students will be visiting Shimer and competing for two full-tuition and two half-tuition scholarships.

## News From Shimer

### Students Prepare for Summer Internships

Shimer students prepare for the summer and the Shimer College Internship & Mentorship program. How can alumni help?

### Contact Former Classmates

Don't forget that you can search for and contact your former classmates using the Shimer Alumni online community.

At the end of the class we looked at the work of each group. We had all done it slightly differently and it really was interesting to see the problems everyone had come up against. All in all, it was an extremely useful lab in helping me to further my understanding of classification. It even allowed me to sympathize a bit with Aristotle's struggle. We were working using his ideas as well as others we've seen or heard of; he was forging all new paths, refuting what had come before him.

I know that this was just an exercise to help us understand and to put the reading into some context, but every time I go to a hardware store now, I'll be thinking of all of the species of nails there are to choose from.

[Donate Now](#)

