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NEWS

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**Ouachita science professors and students recognized
for research presentations at IDeA Conference**

By Cimber Winfrey

November 23, 2015

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Two professors from Ouachita Baptist University's J.D. Patterson School of Natural Sciences were recognized for their research and presentations at the biennial Southeast Regional Institutional Development Award (IDeA) Conference held in Biloxi, Miss., on Nov. 11-13. The conference brought together 350 biomedical researchers from across the nation.

Dr. Lori Hensley, professor of biology and holder of J.D. Patterson chair of biology, was selected to give one of the five oral presentations in the Cancer session. Her presentation, "The Cancer CURE," described how her research in pediatric cancer was used to create a class lab for Ouachita's fall Cell Biology course.

"All of my students chose what kind of cancer they wanted to work on and then they had to do research to figure out which drugs they thought would be most effective," Hensley said.

Dr. Nathan Reyna, associate professor of biology, presented a Bioinformatics poster describing work in his lab by undergraduates Jace Bradshaw and AlleaBelle Gongola, who recently were published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal, *JoVE*.

"My presentation was sort of an offshoot of a research project done in the classroom, where students are actually looking at different ways to look at genes on a computer and physically test the gene models in the lab," Reyna explained. "The big thing we are trying to do at Ouachita is incorporate real research into the classroom. That has been one of our main focuses this semester."

Five Ouachita students also were accepted to make poster presentations, including Logan Bond, who earned one of only three awards given to undergraduate presenters. Bond, a junior computer science major from Prairie Grove, Ark., won third place for his poster presentation, "Computational Investigations of the Enantiospecificity of a Mutated CYP2C9." Bond's research aims to gain a better understanding of the interactions between drugs and proteins in the body.

“The long-term idea is that the better understanding that we have of what actually happens when we put drugs in our bodies, the better we can tailor drug manufacturing to reduce side effects,” Bond said.

The IDeA Conference provided both Ouachita students and faculty with a unique opportunity to network and converse with researchers from other universities and medical schools.

“It's all about networking,” Hensley stated. “We talked to people from other schools, not only in Arkansas, but schools that we are interested in emulating what they do and schools that are interested in what we do. The conference gave us the opportunity to sit down, away from our offices where we are distracted, and talk about what we are doing. It is a good place to tune out everything else and focus in on [our research].”

“It is amazing how we have the ability to take undergraduates that are doing research that qualifies them to present at a biomedical research conference next to biomedical MD PhD's and present on equal footing,” Reyna added. “To do that at Ouachita, with only 300 biology majors, is very impressive.”

“For me, this conference was a confidence booster and a great outreach,” Bond said. “I could delve into the world of research and see the awesome things that people can accomplish. Each of my peers did an incredible job and proved to everyone there, both doctors and graduate students, that Ouachita is capable of achieving great heights.”

In addition to Bond, other students presenters from Ouachita included Rebekah Davis, a senior biology major from Hensley, Ark.; Sydney Heslep, a senior biology major from Mountain Home, Ark.; Trevor Meece, a senior biology and chemistry major from Mountain Home, Ark.; and R.J. Quilao, a senior biology major from Benton, Ark.

For more information, contact Dr. Tim Knight, dean of the Patterson School, at knightt@obu.edu or (870) 245-5528.

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