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Ouachita team selected to present research to members of U.S. Congress

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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita team selected to present research to members of U.S. Congress

By Julie Williams, staff writer for The Signal

March 4, 2016

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—A Ouachita Baptist University research team was chosen to present at the Council of Undergraduate Research's 2016 Posters on the Hill event in Washington, D.C.

Heidi Hughes and John Givler, with collaboration from Dr. Ruth Plymale, assistant professor of biology, were one of only 60 groups of undergraduate researchers chosen to present their findings to members of Congress. They will present their research on problems with antibiotic-resistant pathogens and identification of antibiotic-producing bacteria on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. April 19-20.

"Congratulations to Dr. Ruth Plymale and students Heidi Hughes and John Givler on acceptance to the Council on Undergraduate Research Posters on the Hill for 2016," said Dr. Tim Knight, dean of Ouachita's Patterson School of Natural Sciences. "Research projects for Posters on the Hill undergo a rigorous review process and are selected as the best from around the country."

The group will represent Ouachita on Capitol Hill as they present their research, displayed on posters, to members of Congress in an effort to promote continued funding of undergraduate research. They also will seek out U.S. Sen. Tom Cotton and other representatives of Arkansas to visit with personally. All three of the group said they are greatly looking forward to the trip and are very grateful for the opportunity.

According to its website, the Council of Undergraduate Research is a national non-profit organization whose mission is "to support and promote high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship." It represents more than 900 colleges and universities and several different disciplinary avenues in which to conduct research.

Heidi Hughes, a senior biology major from Hot Springs, Ark., began her research last summer as part of the Small World Initiative, a program that encourages a cooperative effort across the U.S. and eight other countries to address the diminishing supply of effective antibiotics.

Hughes said she "looked for bacteria found in the soil that would produce a new type of antibiotics that might work in a different way than the antibiotics that are commonly used so that they could kill off resistant pathogens." Her portion of the research included finding a bacterium that produced the antibiotic and then "making new methods to extract that antibiotic in the most efficient way possible," she said. Hughes said she plans to continue her research and implement it into her senior thesis.

John Givler, a senior biology major from Monroe, La., also completed his research last summer. According to Givler, his research primarily entailed isolating antibiotic-producing bacteria in the soil to discover if they inhibited the growth of other microbes in the soil around it. Givler said he is interested in pursuing a master's degree in microbiology dealing with similar research.

Dr. Ruth Plymale collaborated throughout the summer with both Hughes and Givler in a supervisory role. She encouraged the two students to apply to the Posters on the Hill program together, considering the comparable nature of their separate research. "I secretly always thought that we would be picked,"

Plymale said. "John and Heidi are great, and I wasn't even a little bit shocked."

For more information, contact the Patterson School of Natural Sciences at (870) 245-5238.