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NEWS

For immediate release

Four Ouachita students earn “Speak Simply” awards at national ACS meeting

By Anna Hurst

April 4, 2016

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

ARKADELPHIA, ARK.—Ouachita Baptist University students won four of the 15 “Speak Simply” awards in the Undergraduate Research Poster Contest at the American Chemical Society (ACS) national meeting held in March in San Diego, Calif. Approximately 1,400 students from across the nation were eligible to compete in the contest, which requires participants to clearly present their research in around two minutes, using language free of technical jargon.

Students who won the award included Jessica Compton, Emily Harris, Nathan Hall and Rachel Tucker. A total of 12 Ouachita students representing the Patterson School of Natural Sciences and the Ouachita ACS student chapter had the opportunity to present their research at the meeting.

Over the four years that the ACS has held the “Speak Simply” contest, Ouachita students have built up a reputation of success, earning 18 of the 60 awards distributed. This year they upheld that reputation, receiving more awards than any other institution, representing nearly a third of the “Speak Simply” award winners.

“Our students’ strong communication skills and passion for research are a strong testament to their own individual talents as well as the collective efforts of all Ouachita faculty who mentor and instruct them,” explained Dr. Marty Perry, professor of chemistry at Ouachita.

Jessica Compton, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Bismark, Ark., presented research over a cancer-fighting molecule that she made called porphryn. Dr. Joe Bradshaw, W.D. and Alice Burch Professor of Chemistry and Pre-Medical Studies at OBU, was her faculty research mentor.

“I was happy to win the award because I know that in my future career as a pharmacist, I will have to be good at communicating about medicine to people who do not know a lot about medicine,” Compton explained. “The trip was a lot of fun, and having to present for the first time made me get out of my comfort zone, which is always good.”

Emily Harris, a senior biology major from Benton, Ark., presented research over which household cleaners best kill communities of bacteria called biofilm. Dr. Ruth Plymale, associate professor of biology at OBU, was her faculty research mentor.

“Students from OBU have a reputation of winning these awards yearly at the ACS convention, so I was proud to keep that reputation going,” Harris said. “I had never presented my research from last fall prior to this trip, so that experience was valuable to me.”

Nathan Hall, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Jonesboro, Ark., presented research over the long-term effects of nicotine exposure through the use of nicotine gum. Dr. Grover Miller, associate professor for the biochemistry and molecular biology department at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, was his faculty research mentor.

Rachel Tucker, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Fordyce, Ark., presented research over her work synthesizing a unique compound and its effectiveness at killing breast cancer cells. Dr. Bradshaw also served as her faculty research mentor.

“Winning the Speak Simply award was very fulfilling for me,” Tucker noted, “because it demonstrates that I am able to communicate scientific concepts in a way that is understandable to all people, no matter what kind of scientific background they might have. I feel that this is a good quality to have because, as a future pharmacist, I will need to be able to explain medicines and their effects on the body to my patients in a clear and concise manner.”

“Our students are wonderful,” added Dr. Bradshaw, who also serves as chair of Ouachita’s Department of Chemistry and Physics. “Not only did they present the results of their research but they also performed chemistry demonstrations using household chemicals for other universities from around the U.S. and Puerto Rico in order that others may learn to share their enthusiasm for chemistry. Each of the students was a model of professional behavior while attending the meeting.”

Other students who made research presentations included Jean Eudes Benecyo, a senior biology major from Rwanda; Logan Bond, a junior biology and computer science double major from Prairie Grove, Ark.; Jace Bradshaw, a junior chemistry, physics and biology triple major from Arkadelphia, Ark.; Harrison Daniel, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Conway, Ark.; Jessica Hargis, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Camden, Ark.; Allie Hegi, a senior chemistry and biology double major from El Dorado, Ark.; Sydney Heslep, a senior biology major from Mountain Home, Ark.; and Trevor Meece, a senior chemistry and biology double major from Mountain Home, Ark.

The OBU ACS student chapter was also recognized as an “Outstanding Student Chapter” for their work during the 2014-2015 academic year. Ouachita’s chapter was the only one from Arkansas to receive this honor.

“The overall work ethic of OBU’s ACS chapter is amazing, and every student that participates realizes that chapter success is a group endeavor; this was clearly demonstrated by being named as an Outstanding Chapter,” Dr. Bradshaw noted. “The entire faculty of the natural sciences, not only chemistry, is diligent in the preparation and mentoring of our students. The guidance of students in the research endeavor is extremely important in the sciences.”

For more information on Ouachita’s Department of Chemistry and Physics, contact Dr. Joe Bradshaw at bradshawj@obu.edu or (870) 245-5218.