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For immediate release

**Ouachita students, faculty earn top honors at Alpha Chi national convention**

*By Rachel Gaddis*

May 2, 2016

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Ouachita Baptist University students and faculty earned numerous top honors at the recent Alpha Chi national honor society convention in Alexandria, Va. An OBU student research team won the Collaborative Research Award, the largest prize of the convention, for the second consecutive year. Junior Jace Bradshaw earned one of two national Edwin W. Gaston, Jr. Scholarships for undergraduate research as well as the Region II Scholarship and was elected as a Region II student delegate to the national council. Dr. Lori Hensley earned one of two national Outstanding Sponsor Awards and was elected president of Region II.

Jace Bradshaw, Stoni Butler and Rebekah Davis were members of the research team that won the Collaborative Research Award, earning a \$5,000 prize for the chapter. The competition required students from at least three different majors to design and implement an interdisciplinary research project that fit a theme determined by the Alpha Chi national office; this year's theme was "Transcending Boundaries." This project was supported by the Arkansas INBRE program, with a grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, P20 GM103429 from the National Institutes of Health.

"I'm incredibly proud of them for representing Ouachita so well at the convention," said Dr. Stan Poole, Ouachita's vice president for academic affairs. "This is a national honor society with top students from across the country. What that says to me is that the education our students receive at Ouachita prepares them to compete with the very best. It's a testament to the excellence and hard work of both our students and faculty that they were able to walk away with the top prize."

The team also was required to write a 10-page paper, create a poster and present their work at the convention. Bradshaw, a junior biology, chemistry and physics triple major from Arkadelphia, Ark.; Butler, a senior psychology major from Camden, Ark.; and Davis, a senior biology major from Hensley, Ark.; began working together in August 2015. Butler also serves as president of OBU's Alpha Chi chapter.

Dr. Lori Hensley, Ouachita's Alpha Chi faculty sponsor, said she believes the reason Ouachita students have won the Collaborative Research Award for the second year in a row is because "they are not only creative and hard-working, but they are also excited about research and communicating what they learn." Hensley also serves as professor of biology and holder of the J.D. Patterson Chair of Biology.

Reflecting on his first year to attend and compete at the Alpha Chi convention, Bradshaw said, "Alpha Chi has taught me how to share ideas I am passionate about in a relatable way to people from all fields and backgrounds, and the national convention was no different. As a group, Stoni, Rebekah and I got to share our research with over 200 people from a wide range of backgrounds."

In addition to his role in the award-winning Collaborative Research Project, Bradshaw won the Edwin W. Gaston, Jr. Scholarship for his work with Ouachita's Dr. Nathan Reyna in the field of synthetic biology. Bradshaw and Reyna, associate professor of biology, designed a method to test components of the bacteriophage genome to determine whether they acted as a molecular stop sign. This research was supported in part by the National Science Foundation under grant No. IIA-1457888. Several research institutions, including Columbia University, have purchased this testing method. Two Gaston Scholarships for \$2,500 each are awarded annually for senior undergraduate research.

"It was validating for my research to come out on top, even when compared to the brightest of my peers," Bradshaw said. "Winning the scholarship was a wonderful personal accomplishment, but I think it speaks more to the quality of research Ouachita performs."

Hensley also received the Outstanding Sponsor Award, one of two given nationally. She said her favorite part of being a sponsor is her students.

"Because I teach only science classes, I don't get the opportunity to meet students in other academic areas on campus," she said. "Alpha Chi gives me that opportunity. I love working with some of our brightest students to host academic events and community service projects. It is a wonderful experience for me to see them when their hard work pays off, as it did at the convention this year."

"Dr. Hensley has transformed our local chapter by finding ways to engage the students and motivate them to do their best work," Poole added. "I've been very impressed with her leadership and with the accomplishments of the chapter over the last few years."

Bradshaw and Hensley also were recognized as leaders within Region II, which includes more than 40 chapters across Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas. Bradshaw received the Region II Scholarship and was elected as a Region II student delegate to the national council, a role in which he will represent Ouachita and help plan future national meetings. Hensley was elected as president of the region. Being appointed to this position, she said, acknowledges the work of Ouachita students at the regional and national levels, placing "Ouachita in the academic spotlight where it belongs."

Dr. Justin Isenhour, assistant professor of music, also serves as a faculty sponsor for Ouachita's chapter. In addition to Butler, the following students serve as Ouachita's Alpha Chi officers: Gary Fortney, a senior nutrition and dietetics major from Stillwater, Okla., serves as vice president; and Evan Wheatley, a junior music and mass communications double major from Camden, Ark., serves as secretary.

Established in 1922, Alpha Chi is, according to its website, "a coeducational academic honor society" that seeks to "promote academic excellence and exemplary character among college and university students and to honor those who achieve such distinction."

For more information on Ouachita's Alpha Chi chapter, contact Dr. Lori Hensley at [hensleyl@obu.edu](mailto:hensleyl@obu.edu) or (870) 245-5529.