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NEWS

For immediate release

Ouachita biology students represent Arkansas on Capitol Hill

By Rachel Gaddis

May 9, 2016

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—A Ouachita Baptist University research team presented their findings to members of Congress at the 20th annual Posters on the Hill event in Washington, D.C. Heidi Hughes and John Givler represented OBU on Capitol Hill among 60 undergraduate research groups from across the nation. Nearly 400 schools nationwide applied to attend the event, and Ouachita was the only university selected from the state of Arkansas.

Posters on the Hill is hosted by the Council of Undergraduate Research, a national non-profit organization that promotes “high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship.”

Hughes, a senior biology major from Hot Springs, Ark., and Givler, a senior biology major from Monroe, La., conducted research last summer on antibiotic-producing bacteria alongside Dr. Ruth Plymale, Ouachita associate professor of biology.

While in Washington April 19-20, Hughes and Givler had the opportunity to talk about their findings with Sens. John Boozman and Tom Cotton of Arkansas, Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana, Rep. Ralph Abraham of Louisiana and Rep. Bruce Westerman of Arkansas to promote continued funding of undergraduate research.

“Presenting to members of our government was very exciting in that we were pleasantly surprised by how many of them had a science background and were able to relate to our research,” Givler said. “Seeing congressmen and senators excited for undergraduate research was encouraging and made all of our effort seem worthwhile.”

Plymale said Hughes and Givler presented their work and answered questions with confidence. “I was extremely proud of John and Heidi and how they represented themselves, their work and Ouachita,” she said.

Hughes and Givler conducted separate yet similar research on antibiotic-producing bacteria found in soil, but because of the similarities, Dr. Plymale encouraged them to apply to Posters on the Hill and present their work together. While Givler’s research consisted of isolating the bacteria in the soil to discover if they inhibited the growth of microbes around them Hughes’ research involved creating new methods for extracting the antibiotics..

“My initial hope was that, through the external validation of their work by Posters on the Hill, John and Heidi would understand that they were valuable, that they were doing important work that extended beyond themselves and that they were good scientists with knowledge to contribute to others,” Plymale said.

After returning from Washington, Hughes and Givler also were able to talk about their experience and share their research with Ouachita faculty and students during OBU’s Scholars Day on April 27.

Plymale said that her students' acceptance into Posters on the Hill is just one example of how Ouachita is "a big school in a small school package."

"One of our positive attributes is our close-knit community," she said. "Yet, Ouachita offers students and faculty 'big school' experiences and opportunities."

For more information, contact Dr. Ruth Plymale at plymaler@obu.edu or (870) 245-5081.