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Ouachita's Patterson School of Natural Sciences hosts Arkansas' first Women in STEM Conference

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For immediate release

Ouachita's Patterson School of Natural Sciences hosts Arkansas' first Women in STEM Conference

X	Y	Percent Yield
		94.8
		96.4
		95.6
		90.1
		90.8
		54.0
		102.0

Sharon K. Hamilton

By Abby Turner
March 25, 2021

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Ouachita Baptist University's Patterson School of Natural Sciences hosted the inaugural Arkansas Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Conference on Saturday, March 20, for college students across the state. The virtual event was conducted entirely over Zoom and featured a keynote address by chemist Dr. E. Ann Nalley, seven concurrent panel discussions with 31 professional women in STEM fields and two sessions of poster presentations highlighting woman-led research and honoring notable women's contributions to STEM.

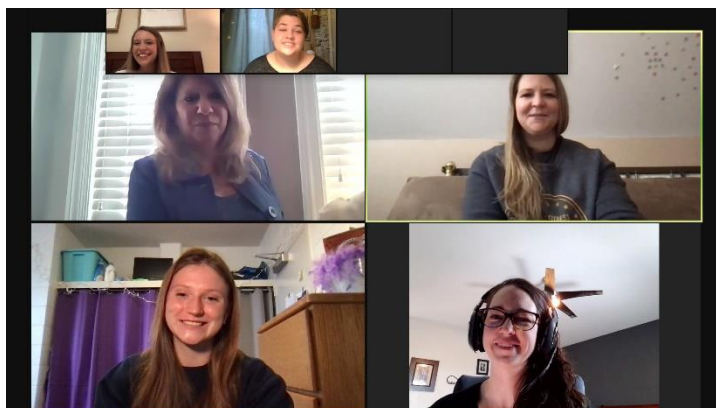


According to the conference's website, the goal of the event was "to recognize the significant contributions by women in STEM fields while educating young women about the potential of their STEM degrees." More than 40 Arkansas undergraduate or graduate students and faculty members representing five universities from around the state were in attendance; several out-of-state participants also joined the conference.

"To our knowledge, there has never been a Women in STEM conference held in Arkansas," said Dr. Sharon Hamilton, director of the event and assistant professor of chemistry at Ouachita, "and we decided to take advantage of Zoom to encourage attendance across the state. This also allowed us to bring in a variety of professionals for our panel and keynote speakers from across the U.S."

Dr. Nalley, the keynote speaker for the conference, became the first female faculty member of Cameron University in 1978 and served on the board of directors as well as president of Phi Kappa Phi national honor society and also as president of the American Chemical Society (ACS). In 2015, Nalley was recognized with the ACS Award for Encouraging Women into Careers in the Chemical Sciences. She also holds a Ph.D. in radiation chemistry from Texas Woman's University.

"Ouachita hosting an event with a prominent and nationally recognized keynote speaker like Dr. Ann Nalley is truly a treat for all of the attendees and speaks to the size of the professional network that Ouachita faculty maintain," Hamilton said. "When I think about all the panelists, our keynote speaker and volunteers we had for the conference, I am humbled that they chose to walk beside us in creating a Women in STEM conference that not only benefited students in Arkansas but across the region thanks to technology."



Picture 1 The Women in STEM Conference offered seven concurrent panel discussions with 31 professional women in STEM fields.

In addition to Hamilton, Ouachita's Dr. Sara Hubbard, associate professor of chemistry and holder of the Nell I. Mondy Chair of Chemistry, helped spearhead the conference with assistance from other faculty members in the Patterson School of Natural Sciences.

"While so much progress has been made toward workplace equity for women and men, there is still work to be done," Hubbard said. "Showing our students that there are other women out there who have dealt with the same struggles, questions and challenges is important – especially to see that these women have emerged from their experiences as talented women at the tops of their fields."

"Our faculty really want to encourage young women to major in and work in a science field," said Dr. Tim Knight, dean of Ouachita's School of Natural Sciences and professor of biology. "We currently have more young ladies than young men majoring in the sciences at Ouachita!"

Students in Ouachita's School of Natural Sciences, particularly students in the ACS and Gamma Sigma Epsilon chemistry honor society chapters, also were heavily involved with planning the conference, from contacting panelists to applying for grants.

Kayla Churchwell, president of Ouachita's chapter of ACS and a senior chemistry, biology and Spanish triple major from Searcy, Ark., coordinated much of the ACS chapter's efforts. To provide monetary winnings for poster awards, Taylor Barnhart and Caroline Cole co-wrote a 2020 ACS virtual programming grant, and Jasmine Baughman wrote a special project grant; both were selected for funding. Barnhart is a sophomore biology major from North Little Rock, Ark.; Cole is a freshman biology major from Benton, Ark.; and Baughman is a senior biology major from Pangburn, Ark.

"Our students and faculty taking the initiative to create an event with the goal of connecting and inspiring college-aged women in STEM sends a message to others that Ouachita continues to push forward and meet the needs of students locally and statewide," Hamilton said.

Aiiryel McCoy, a junior chemistry major from Shannon Hills, Ark., and member of Ouachita's ACS student chapter, moderated the morning session of the chemistry panel as well as the afternoon session of the allied health panel. McCoy plans to attend medical school upon graduation with hopes of becoming a dermatologist and one day to pursue her Ph.D. and conduct her own research.

"This event is what girls and women in Arkansas need," McCoy said. "I was able to walk away with resources – people, places and potent truths – that I can use in the future."

For more information about the J.D. Patterson School of Natural Sciences, visit obu.edu/natsci. For more information about the Women in STEM Conference, contact Dr. Sharon Hamilton at hamiltons@obu.edu or (870) 245-5092.

PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD <https://obu.edu/stories/news/2021/03/ouachita-patterson-school-of-natural-sciences-hosts-arkansas-first-women-in-stem-conference.php>