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Student Highlights

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OUR awards Summer Research Grants to Non-Honors Students

Last year, the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) awarded Summer Research Grants to 25 non-honors undergraduate students. The Inquiry team met with few of these Summer grant recipients to reflect on their experience with their mentors and the program.

The Summer Undergraduate Research Grant Program was established in order to support experimental projects from a wide range of disciplines at the University of Arkansas. These projects are facilitated through student-faculty collaboration. OUR expects to continue funding non-honors undergraduate students to pursue research.



Elizabeth Hays, a senior biology major from Springhill, Kansas, is studying the effect(s) of construction on the native box turtles on Markham Hill. Hays is working under Dr. J.D. Wilson, whose lab was contacted by the real-estate company that purchased Markham to safely move the turtles to a new home range. Hays said the field materials required to track and monitor these turtles are extremely expensive.

Hays, along with all of the other undergraduate students participating in the program, stressed the technology and other equipment necessary to execute their projects

would have been out of their price range if not for receiving the grant.

Many of the students found their mentors through doing online research and did not know them before participating in the grant program. Alexia Lo, a senior biochemistry major from Gentry, Arkansas, is one of these students. Lo says that her mentor, Dr. Paul Adams, became like a father to her over their time working together.

“My grandfather passed away with colon cancer. I remember having a conversation with Dr. Adams... he had something on his webpage that said what got him to become a research professor because his mother passed away with cancer. And so me and him, we had a long conversation about cancer and losing someone that we love to it. So that's what inspired me. I decided I want to do something that would impact the community, you know, help out.”

Dr. Adams' lab uses a variety of biochemical techniques to characterize interactions between proteins that have roles in the onset of diseases, such as cancer.

Besides growing strong relationships with professionals in their desired career fields, all of the students conveyed gratitude for the resume-building experience, and advocated that any student interested in undergraduate research should pursue it.

“The one motto that I've always been reminded of during my three semesters of working in the laboratory is to think critically and ‘work smarter, not harder’”, Lo remarked. “Aside from critical thinking, research also aids in bettering skills needed in the real world-like communication, writing, being able to interpret and analyze data, and a lot more.”

Interviews conducted by Sophia Nourani

Honors Corner

The past year has been a banner year for honors students engaged in undergraduate research. The Covid pandemic took a toll on students' progress, as time in labs was curtailed, museums and archives closed, and in-person interviews and studies ended or forced online. However, with the aid of their mentors, students have persevered and adapted their research methods to our new normal.

Across three grant deadlines this year, the Honors College has awarded 160 Honors College Research Grants, providing \$514,00 in funding to students and \$240,000 to their mentors. Students are engaged in grant-funded research across all six colleges. This year students also started presenting research at in-person conferences for the first time since before the pandemic. Over two dozen honors students won a Conference/Workshop Travel Grant to present research at regional, national, and even international conferences.

Research experiences can be wildly different depending on a student's course of study and their specific interests. However, regardless of what topic a student chooses to pursue, research can have a tremendous impact on their undergraduate experience and their prospects after graduation. Some students' research will help propel them into graduate or professional schools, while others plan to leverage the skills they developed through research as leverage on the job market. The experiences of two students, one in Biology and the other in English Creative Writing, showcase the breadth of research and what it offers students:

Davin Means, a Biology major headed to medical school in the Fall, is researching glioblastomas and the differentiation between IDH mutant and IDH wildtype cells. Davin's research has been challenging but also rewarding! He writes of his experience, "The Honors College Research Grant has transformed me into a more patient, detail-oriented person, and under the guidance of Dr. Rajaram, my critical thinking skills in regard to experimental design have greatly improved." Davin has developed many diverse skills from research: "I have learned that carefully planned, methodically organized, extensively detailed, and consistently documented experimentation minimizes the risk of confounding variables, and I have come to understand the importance of scientific rigor and transparency in reducing experimental bias...Furthermore, in working with...peers in the lab, I've become acquainted with the synergy, communication, and cooperation necessary for the advancement of science and research."



Davin Means, bringing glioblastoma cells into focus using the Bruker Ultima Investigator inverted multiphoton microscope.

Olivia Schapp, a senior English Creative Writing major who wrote a collection of personal essays for her thesis, found that though her research wasn't "traditional," it will still give her an advantage as she pursues her writing career. "My thesis has not only honed my craft as a writer, helped me grow interpersonally, and given me a network of faculty and resources," Olivia said, "but it will also leave me with polished works for my portfolio upon my graduation in Spring of 2022. I have been fortunate to have several nonfiction essays published in local journals, and am excited that my thesis will add another distinction to my CV to help me advance my writing career." Olivia used her Honors College Research Grant as a personal stipend, freeing up more time to dedicate to her writing.



Olivia Schaap “assumes the (writing) position” to work on her series of personal essays.

No matter your major, honors research is a rewarding endeavor and sets you apart from your peers!

Interested in starting your honors research?

- Find out what is required for research by your college. Go to the honors website for your academic college and read the information there regarding the honors thesis. These links are also available at honorshub.uark.edu, under the Research tab.
- Collect information and examples of research in your major. Visit honorsstories.uark.edu to read dozens of blogs written by students about their research. Talk to your professors or graduate assistants about what research typically looks like in your discipline.
- Consider what topics in your field interest you. Remember, you don’t need a specific research question at this point! Just start narrowing down your interests.
- Look into what faculty are researching. You will ask a faculty member to be your mentor whose research expertise aligns with your interests. Visit the departmental website for your major and/or closely related fields. Google the name of your department and “UARK” to find the departmental website. Then go to the faculty directory and click on their names to see their profiles.
- Seek out additional help! The Research tab on honorshub.uark.edu has more information on finding a research topic and a mentor. Keep an eye out for workshops on these topics and more! You can also schedule a 1:1 meeting with the Director of Grants and Research Innovation, Chelsea Hodge, on UASuccess for additional guidance.