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Featured Faculty Mentor and Student Explore the Dynamics of this Research Relationship

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Featured Faculty Mentor and Student Explore the Dynamics of this Research Relationship

Every scientist can identify past interactions with passionate, patient mentors that fundamentally altered their career trajectory. At the Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences, the opportunity to interact with and inspire students at pivotal points in their lives happens in and outside of the classroom. As mentors, we have the possibility of positively impact students' futures by building skill sets and confidence. While mentoring students to conduct research in a lab setting, I personally try to focus on active learning involving the application of classroom concepts to real-world examples, which strongly reinforces the learning process. During this process, the students grasp the whole knowledge and application, and it naturally follows that they recognize their own potential to contribute to scientific progress in their field.

By helping students and mentoring them through the process, they think more critically and gain confidence in their potential to meaningfully participate in scientific research. My goal is to cultivate scientists who are thinking critically and actively evaluating the validity of scientific information with healthy skepticism. But, nowadays, it is also key to help students network and understand the social aspect of science. Students should realize that they are problem solvers, but it also involves effective communication and interaction with professionals from our field, other disciplines, and stakeholders.

Working with Evan was a great opportunity not only to have someone with multiple interests and help him identify those areas in which he could excel, but also to help him enter into disciplines identifying different experts that could also give him a wider view of the field. Evan was always looking for opportunities, and that active role of the student is also key for success. As mentor, I was able to channel his interest without limiting his interests in other areas. During his time, Evan was able to participate in different summer programs, and I was able to guide him during the process. It has been a great experience, and I am glad that Evan is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology.



Dr. Alejandro Rojas
Faculty Mentor of
Evan Buckner

Alejandro Rojas, Assistant Professor, University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology

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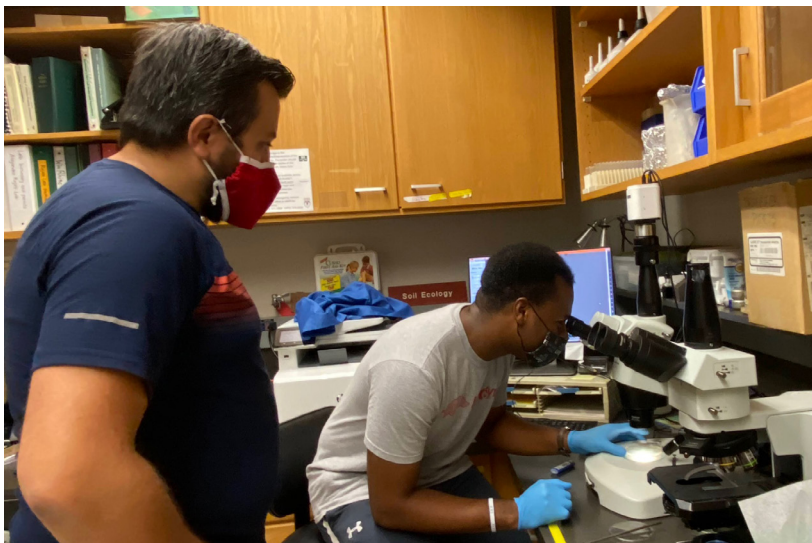
Undergraduate research is something that may go overlooked by some students during their time at a university. The wealth of knowledge and unsurpassable relationships formed during my time conducting undergraduate research in the Dale Bumpers College have been both a privilege and a learning experience. One of the things that I look back on is not just the end result but the journey it took to reach there. Researching under Dr. Alejandro Rojas in the Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology really exposed me to an endless world of plant pathogenic fungi, specifically the genus of fungi that I was matched to work on. It is amazing to now know that I can go out into cropping fields and identify the plant pathogens I studied and immediately go into an entire discussion on their morphology and how they interact with their hosts! Another benefit of this research journey is where it has landed me.

Plant pathology is such an intricate field not only in the research conducted but in the scientists that work within this discipline. In my sophomore year of college, I had the privilege to work with Dr. Rojas' former graduate school advisor, Dr. Chilvers, and it furthered my interest and curiosity for plant pathology! The culmination of working with Dr. Rojas and Dr. Childers, and a host of other experiences is what led me to apply and later be accepted into my graduate program for plant pathology. The research project I worked on with Dr. Rojas has opened not only my mind but my curiosity to more ways to control plant pathogens, and it is a curiosity I know will drive me to go and do the very best I can in my field.



Evan Buckner
Bumpers Student

Evan Buckner,
May 2021 Honors graduate in Crop Science



LAB WORK: Evan and his mentor Dr. Rojas, at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Harry R. Rosen Alternative Pest Control Center, examining some of the isolations done from leaf plant material and looking at the spores to examine if they were successful in isolating *Cercospora*. Photo by Amber Lancaster.