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

Matt Bertucci
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Gracie Morrison
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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

I feel very fortunate to have participated as a faculty mentor for the Bumpers College Honors Program. As an assistant professor in my second year, many opportunities and projects arise. It becomes important to use some discretion about which opportunities to pursue. I am happy to say that the honors thesis project that Gracie and I pursued was one of the opportunities that proved beneficial for all parties. Gracie was my first honors student advisee, and I feel very lucky to have worked with her. She is a hard worker and a skilled researcher. She helped every week from starting the tomatoes in the greenhouse to harvesting tomatoes at season's end. And while summer conditions in our high tunnel may have become a little unpleasant, Gracie continued to diligently maintain her plots, whether suckering tomatoes, hand-weeding, or taking care of any other maintenance necessary. Further, Gracie worked independently and with other faculty to generate our economic data. This was no small task because I had no idea how to analyze these data, so Gracie and Dr. Mike Popp deserve all the credit for our economic analysis.

Of course I was proud and excited to serve as a mentor for an undergraduate student, but I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the guidance that I received along the way. Dr. Mike Popp, Dr. David Miller, and Dr. Mary Savin all served as committee members on Gracie's honors committee. They each took an active role in developing the project and ensuring that Gracie had a firm understanding of the experimental design, hypotheses, and measurements to be collected. These faculty members served as shining examples of effective mentoring and offered gentle guidance to ensure the success of the project. I learned a lot from each of them in our short time working together. Lastly, I would like to thank the Honors College for awarding Gracie and myself the Honors College Research Grant, which facilitated the expenses associated with the supplies and labor for the execution of this project. Without that financial support, this project would not have been possible.



Dr. Matt Bertucci
Faculty Mentor of
Gracie Morrison

Matt Bertucci, Assistant Professor, University
of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's
Department of Horticulture

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I was initially intimidated by the prospect of completing an undergraduate thesis, given that I had never been part of a research project before. However, I can now confidently say that completing my undergraduate honors thesis for the Dale Bumpers College was the most rewarding part of my college career.

I had the pleasure of working with Dr. Bertucci, a professor of Horticulture, as my mentor. Through this collaboration, I learned a great deal about economic considerations and analysis in the field of horticulture. The process of working with Dr. Bertucci to develop, conduct, and write up a research project has been rigorous and fulfilling. I learned what it takes to manage tomatoes in a high-tunnel, including the expenses and expected profits associated with horticultural operations. I also got some experience with weed identification and weed management application, which has been useful in my garden at home.

Dr. Bertucci gave advice and guidance when there were aspects of the project requiring his experience. During my time at the University of Arkansas, I forged relationships with my mentors and professors that I will never forget. Although I have now graduated from the University of Arkansas, I hope to continue my journey of learning and developing my knowledge of the field.



Gracie Morrison
Bumpers Student

Gracie Morrison,
May 2022 Honors graduate in Environmental,
Soil, and Water Science



IN THE FIELD: Gracie and her mentor Dr. Bertucci, at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture's Agricultural Experiment Station greenhouses with tomato plants. Photo by Fred Miller.