

Dec. 12, 2008

FVSU students capture top awards at forum



Fort Valley State University students are shining up the top prizes won at the third annual Peach State Louis-Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Fall Forum and Research Conference. Forty-five students attended the event in Savannah. At the forum, students presented research, competed for academic awards in the poster and oral sessions and attended graduate fairs and professional workshops.

“Our students put on an impressive display in the poster sessions, coming away with five awards,” said FVSU LSAMP Director Dr. Dwayne Daniels, an associate professor of chemistry, who helped plan the trip. In the poster competition, FVSU life science majors **Amber Davis and Lillian Oglesby** won two first place awards. Katori Macon nabbed second place and Isaiah Tookes received a third place honor. During oral presentations, Cesunica Ivey captured first-place in math. Tiffany Gray vaulted to first place in the life sciences category, with fellow majors Chinakasiobi Mbata, Ebony Davis and Jasmine Williams earning a second place finish. Octavia Felton and Shabrekia Arnold won third. In chemistry, Deniya Dozier sprinted to third place. Dr. Frederick McLaughlin, Tiffany Bland and Dr. Babatunda Ojo accompanied the group.

The mission of the Peach State LSAMP is to increase the number of underrepresented minority students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields in the state. LSAMP is a collaborative endeavor led by four University System of Georgia schools: FVSU, Georgia Perimeter College, Savannah State University and Southern Polytechnic State University.

For more information on LSAMP, contact Daniels at (478) 825-6245.

Nov. 21, 2008



A group of Fort Valley State University Science Technology Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) Scholars pose at the recent Historically Black Colleges and Universities – Undergraduate Programs (HBCU-UP) meeting sponsored by the National Science Foundation in Atlanta.

FVSU scholars don't leave conference empty handed

Submitted by the Agricultural Communications

Six Fort Valley State University National Science Foundation (NSF)-funded STEM Scholars won awards at the Historically Black Colleges and Universities – Undergraduate Programs (HBCU-UP) meeting sponsored by the NSF at the Westin Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta from Oct. 23-26. There were approximately 700 attendees. The 23 Fort Valley State students attended the event with Dr. Sarwan Dhir, the director of the FVSU's Center for Biotechnology who oversees multiple undergraduate research programs. Dr. Melinda F. Davis, interim chair of FVSU's Biology Department, also attended the event.

“The research work presented by our students is comparable to research being done anywhere else,” Dhir said. “For our students to attend and win awards at this big conference and walk away with honors is a clear example of their academic prowess as young scholars.”

There were approximately 700 attendees and were more than 300 poster and 150 oral presentations from STEM students throughout the country. Students received \$300 for first place, \$200 for second place and \$100 for third place.

The following students were honored:

Gabrielle Jones, a junior majoring in biology won the first place award in Environmental Science category for her poster, “The Affects of a Dominant Competitor, *Distaplia occidentalis*, on Species Richness and Community Structure in Humboldt Bay, California.”

“I was honored to receive the first place award. This was a big surprise to me. I am thankful that the judges chose my poster,” she said. The aspiring pediatrician added, “My research experience has helped me in many ways. Mostly it improved my critical thinking skills. It taught me how to critically examine and interpret new knowledge. I learned much about marine life that I did not know.”

Tameka Janea Howard, a junior majoring in chemistry won second place in the biological sciences category. She conducted her research during a summer internship at Fort Valley State University’s Center for Biotechnology. Her poster project was entitled, “High Frequency Plant Regeneration in *Valeriana officinalis* via Somatic Embryogenesis.”

“I feel very proud about my winning, not only because of the award or recognition but simply because other scientist who evaluated my research and presentation thought it was significant and innovative; therefore, it gives me a sense of validation that what I am doing is fundamental in the continuance of research,” Howard said.

This aspiring pharmacist said she is grateful for the biotechnology program at FVSU that focuses on plant science.

“My involvement and accomplishments within this program have motivated me at times when I needed it most.” Howard said. “I just want Dr. Dhir and [research professional] Dr. [Hari] Singh and all of the other mentors within the Biotechnology Center to know that I am immensely thankful beyond words for the dedication and commitment that they have for me and other students in impacting and shaping our futures in the careers of science.

Lillian Oglesby a junior majoring in Plant Science with a concentration in biotechnology won second place in the environmental science category. Her poster presentation was entitled, “Sequencing the Sixth Chromosome of the Potato Genome.”

“I feel honored and privileged,” said Oglesby, who conducted her research at Michigan State University for the presentation.

Oglesby, who plans to pursue a doctorate in plant genomics, said she is thankful for those who work with her at the Center for Biotechnology. “I appreciate their willingness to allow me the opportunity to work in their lab, and they were very supportive and encouraging,” she said.

Jarielle Fluellen, a senior majoring in animal science, won second place in the biological sciences category for her poster presentation on “How Many Cells Can Be Harvested from a Pig’s Umbilical Cord?” She conducted her research at a summer internship at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

“I was extremely excited about winning the award at such a prestigious conference,” Fluellen said. “This was also my first internship and first time presenting at a national level so I was very

fortunate for the opportunity.”

Fluellen would like to pursue a career in the fields of either pharmacology or nursing.

“I would like to thank my mentors for encouraging me to participate in [the HBCU-UP] program and for challenging me as a student and researcher. Their efforts and mine will ultimately give me the opportunity to make a smooth and successful transition from undergraduate to graduate school,” Fluellen said.

Charlie Ponder III, a junior majoring in biology, won first place in the biology category for his poster, “Investigating Root-Knot Nematode Infection of Amino Acid Transport Mutants.” He did his summer internship at Donald Danforth Plant Science Center in St. Louis, Mo.

“I am grateful to have won an award of this caliber. I plan to someday become an orthodontist. The Biology Department at FVSU provided me with the basic essentials to go out and present my research information with not only class, but dignity,” Ponder said.

Megan Wilkerson won third place for her oral presentation in the biology category. Her presentation was entitled “Comparing Chemical Components of a Baseline Type of Switchgrass Leaves to Efficiently Promote the Conversion of Lignocellulose into Sugar for Ethanol Production.”

September 23, 2008

FVSU students make presentations in Puerto Rico

Submitted by the Agricultural Communications Department



(Above) Participants of the recent Undergraduate Research Symposium in San Juan, Puerto Rico, pose for a photo.

(From L-R) Kaisa T. Muller of the Universidad Metropolitana in San Juan; Megan Wilkerson of Fort Valley State University;

Monica A. Umpierre of the Universidad Metropolitana and 2007 intern at FVSU; Tameka Janea Howard of FVSU;

Dr. Sarwan Dhir of FVSU; Lillian Oglesby of FVSU and Gabrielle Jones of FVSU. (Below) Wilkerson (center),

a sophomore and National Science Foundation STEM scholar majoring in biology, poses for a photo at the symposium.

She received an outstanding oral presentation award and was honored by four Presidential Awardees for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring who were recognized at the White House in the years indicated:

(L-R) Dr. Howard Adams, a seminar presenter with the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (1996);

Dhir, director of the Center for Biotechnology and an associate professor at FVSU (2005); Dr. Gayle Slaughter, program

director for National Institutes of Health's SMART and MORE programs (2006); and Dr. Juan F. Arratia, director of the

Universidad Metropolitana's Model Institutions for Excellence program (2006).

Fort Valley State University students strutted their scientific knowledge at the recent 19th annual Undergraduate Research Symposium and ended up coming out on top.

Four FVSU students made scientific presentations at the event in Puerto Rico from Sept. 12 -13, and one of them received \$1,000 and a laptop for making the best oral presentation during the meeting attended by more than 170 participants.

“It felt good to represent my school. I felt accomplished in a room full of scholars and I came out on top,” said Megan Wilkerson, the FVSU biology major who won the best poster presentation award.

Wilkerson’s topic was about the use of switchgrass for ethanol production. This past summer the Savannah native participated in a 10-week collaborative internship with FVSU and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. She worked with Dr. Neal Stewart, a professor at the University of Tennessee. Her internship was funded by a \$300,000 Sun Grant. The Sun Grant Initiative is a national network of land-grant universities, which includes FVSU, and federally-funded laboratories working together to further establish a bio-based economy.



“All the students did a truly excellent and very professional job presenting their research. Seeing our students present their research is always a rewarding experience,” said Dr. Sarwan Dhir, an associate professor of biotechnology at FVSU who mentors the students. “It’s even better when their work is recognized by judges from other schools. We are truly proud of the work of our students.”

The Undergraduate Research Symposium is a mini-conference that provides undergraduate students with the opportunity to share their research studies in a learning environment while gaining professional skills and experience in presenting their research to an academic audience.

A total of 170 presentations were accepted by the symposium committee and each presentation was reviewed by three judges. Only 13 presentations received awards.

Wilkerson's classmates – Tameka Howard, Gabrielle Jones and Lillian Oglesby – who are National Science Foundation STEM scholars, were among many students from around the country who made poster presentations.

“Undergraduate research provides the students with a capstone educational experience,” said Dhir, who directs multiple undergraduate research programs at FVSU and helps the students prepare their presentations. “In its best sense, the presentations foster critical thinking skills in devising a research plan, discipline in executing the plan and care in analyzing the results of that inquiry.”

Kaisa T. Muller, a senior in the cell and molecular biology program at the Universidad Metropolitana in San Juan, Puerto Rico, interned in 2007 with the National Science Foundation-sponsored Research Experiences for Undergraduates summer program at FVSU. She won the Best Poster Presentation Award and received \$1,000 at the symposium.

“During the summer I got to experience a wide diversity of people and cultures while expanding my knowledge thanks to an amazing faculty and scientific research [at FVSU]. FVSU offers a great opportunity for development not only in the academic aspect, but also for individuals,” Muller said.

She thanked Seema Dhir, an assistant professor of biology of FVSU, to allow her to conduct independent research project on genetic transformation in Valeriana, a medicinal plant.

While at the symposium, Dhir conducted a workshop at the Universidad Metropolitana campus on the “Impact of Biotechnology in Society and Career Research Opportunities for Undergraduates.” More than 75 undergraduates and faculty members attended the workshop.