

*HURP Travel Award Conference Summary*

Early in the spring of 2023, I submitted my original research to the Equine Science Society (ESS) in the hopes of my abstract being accepted into their bi-yearly symposium, occurring this year June 6-9 in Grapevine, TX. I had never written an abstract before, but with the help of great mentors and graduate students, the abstract (“Effects of melatonin on inflammatory marker Serum amyloid A (SAA) after exercise”) was submitted, reviewed and revised, and eventually accepted into the symposium under the Exercise Science section of the Undergraduate Student Competition. Along with the abstract acceptance, I was expected to travel to the symposium to give an oral presentation on my project. I thankfully received funding through the HURP and the CALS URSP to alleviate some of the travel expense, and with travel feasible, I prepared a 12-minute PowerPoint presentation and grew excited about my first research symposium experience.

The symposium began on the evening of June 6, so in a slightly chaotic manner, I flew in that afternoon and quickly changed clothes to attend the opening reception. There were around 300 people there from across the United States and world, and the night began with welcomes, housekeeping items, and mingling. I was introduced to a variety of equine science professionals at different universities and gathered names to try to seek out later. Notably, I caught the name of a student who is pursuing a DVM-PhD, a degree track I have contemplated myself but wanted to hear a first-hand experience. Unfortunately, I did not find her at the symposium, but I do have the contact to reach out to in the future.

The next day, June 7, was presentation day, and it began bright and early with an invited talk about the Past, Present, and Future of ESS, featuring three invited speakers. After a brief presentation, the room was opened for questions and discussions. Many relevant and crucial topics were discussed, including the importance of the link between research and industry, continuing equine science education, and the prevalent equine veterinarian shortage. Although the conference was not veterinary focused, there were a few veterinarians in the crowd who voiced great suggestions, i.e., utilizing ESS to collaborate with the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) to jointly brainstorm and work through shortage and crisis issues. Presentations began immediately after, and since my presentation was not until 5:15 P.M., I had the opportunity to listen to many of the other student competitions at both the graduate and undergraduate levels in a variety of areas such as Nutrition, Teaching and Extension, and Equine Biosciences. The variety of research within one section covered a wide berth; no topic was discussed twice. The luncheon featured another invited speaker who spoke on Social License to Operate, exploring public perception to the equine industry. Different points were reviewed, from horse racing to social media videos to the Olympics. Although I have taken courses covering animal science ethics, it was new to hear from a strictly equine perspective.

After hearing more student presentations in the afternoon, my presentation finally arrived. Although the set-up was slightly different than I was used to, I gathered my stride after the first few minutes of nervousness and hit the time-limit perfectly before a 3-minute question period. The most nerve-racking portion of the presentation were the questions: many regarded how and why to use the melatonin for the absolution of inflammation, whereas I was expecting ones on study design. Now, I know to prepare better beforehand for questions; they are equally as important as the presentation preparation. Due to my summer internship requirement, I had to leave after my presentation, but even in my short time there, it was an eye-opening and insightful experience to which I am thankful to have had the opportunity to attend.