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NCUR Travel Report

Last spring, in addition to traveling to Memphis to preach about how amazing *The Lord of the Rings* and Asimov are (which they are, mind you), the Shackouls Honors College also demonstrated the generosity to send me to Atlanta as well to participate in the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. The jump from a regional conference to a national conference was a frightening one, but, nonetheless, a valuable experience and something I would gladly do again.

Once again, I found myself surrounded by, at times, unbelievable passionate and motivated students, boldly claiming how important and groundbreaking their research is. To me surprise, they were not lying. Perhaps the most mentally engaging and challenging experience of my life was wandering the poster session at NCUR. Every project seemed greater than the last and every student unbelievably friendly and articulate. I came away from the session motivated to up the quality of my work and, more than likely, perhaps learned a thing or two as well about fields I would never had otherwise considered, especially that of quantum computing. A non-physicist in every sense of the word, I never considered the applicability of computer science in quantum mechanics, nonetheless, we fill an important role. I was so convinced by the young man giving this poster that I have since enrolled in a quantum computing class and have set on the path of assimilating myself in that field so that I might perform research in it.

Apart from gazing wide-eyed at the world-changing research being performed by my generation, I also presented two papers—one about Tolkien and his use of Anglo-Saxon culture in *The Lord of the Rings* legendarium and the other about Isaac Asimov and how quantum computing and big data can prove his fiction factual.

I found, in what may be described as the hard way, that the jump from regional conference to national conference better resembles being shot out of a catapult. However, there was no hint of rudeness or disdain in the room. It was meant to be difficult and, by surviving it, one can hopefully come out of that furnace a much better scholar. The questions asked were difficult but fair, the ideas conveyed logical yet thought-provoking. And, shockingly enough, I was able to hold my own. Several professors and students congratulated me after the session and offered genuine advice and insight into my project, as well as offering up contact information and readings. The session was nerve-racking and occasionally humbling, yet, somehow, I came out of it confident and open-minded for where my research takes me next.

Finally, as some conferences do, NCUR publishes a proceedings every year in which I cast my paper into the ring. Through divine intervention or pure luck, presenting at NCUR has now resulted in a publication under my name.

Once again, I would like to thank the Shackouls Honors College for their continuing support in my academic growth, and I strongly encourage other undergraduates to take advantage of the myriad of opportunities presented by the college. The path to success is a difficult one and conferences such as NCUR, though tough, serve not as a roadblock, but as a forging iron for ones intellect.