

From April 4<sup>th</sup> – April 6<sup>th</sup> of 2018, I had the privilege to attend the National Council for Undergraduate Research (NCUR) at the University of Central Oklahoma located in Edmond, Oklahoma. Being that this is a conference for undergraduate students presenting research from a whole range of disciplines, this is the first research conference I have been to that was not exclusive to my field. As most of my colleagues were presenting in the liberal arts field, I had the opportunity to view research in topics ranging from gender identity to more delicate topics such as sexual assault. Because of the relatively free schedule we had, I could view research in my field (sustainability) that was truly innovative. The morning of my poster session, the other presenters discussed their research in using piezoelectric disks to harvest fog as a method for drinking water collection in rural areas located around the equator. Being able to discuss my research in sustainable alternatives to wood adhesives as well as sustainable engineering solutions was very refreshing, as it can be isolating to work on research projects and discussing these topics only to a niche group of people. It was also rewarding to be able to inform others from a wide range of disciplines of my research during the poster presentations and to be able to receive feedback so I can properly prepare for the undergraduate symposium held here at Mississippi State University.

During the conference, I was also able to attend information sessions on tips for applying to graduate programs. The session that I attended focused on tips on applying to these programs as a minority. At the session, they summarized the graduate application process as well as provided insight to funding for minority students as well as tips for writing personal statements and statements of diversity. The biggest lesson I learned from that session was to not only focus on the challenges faced as a minority, but how these challenges will allow me to offer a different point of view for my profession.

In the past, I have struggled with my communication and presentation skills so being able to present at research conferences like this have truly helped me improve these soft skills. These conferences also motivate me to continue exceling in my civil engineering program so that the research that I do can continue with the same momentum. I am truly grateful for the travel award bestowed upon me by the Shackouls Honors College.