

During April 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup>, I participated in the National Conference for Undergraduate Research at the University of Memphis in Memphis, TN. This event is the premier conference for undergraduates across the nation, with hundreds of students representing various disciplines come to present their work. This was the first conference I have presented my work at, and the experience itself was really eye opening. The conference allowed for the independence of choosing which projects to observe based on interest, sessions specifically themed on student networking, open houses for the University of Memphis' departments, and a broad graduate school fair. It was great to see the different projects that students were doing, especially projects that were not in my field of study. Normally I am only able to see the work of individuals in STEM fields while I am in Starkville so it was intriguing to listen to students talk about more humanities based projects such as King Arthur's portrayal in the media and the stereotypes of Islam in the Western world while I was there. I participated in a session where the hosts of the conference sat down with undergraduate students and asked us our opinions on a national undergraduate research ambassador program, where our opinions would be used to develop a pilot program that should be starting soon. This session was interesting in that I got to see what other schools offer their undergraduate students in terms of research and what could potentially be done differently at Mississippi State University. The open houses and graduate school fair was beneficial in that I could explore the abundance of opportunities for graduate school, with some schools I never would've thought about being on my radar going into my senior year. I believe the greatest benefit I gained from this conference was the ability to interact with other undergraduates that share the same passion for research that I have. Unfortunately, it can sometimes feel that no one knows or is particularly interested in your work at your home institution because everyone else is busy pursuing their own careers, but this conference really cemented my desire to pursue graduate studies and research as a career because I saw how it truly is important to so many people worldwide. Presenting at a conference of this magnitude also showed me the depth of my knowledge about my subject I did not know I possessed and enhanced my confidence in my work. In addition, I was able to enhance my skillset in public speaking with the presentation of my work as well as networking with other students that had similar projects. The travel award from the Shackouls Honor's College allowed me to have this great experience and offset the expenses of said program and I believe it was definitely put to good use.