

Student Spotlight



Jeffrey Petty

Throughout my college career, I have had many opportunities to enhance my experience at WVU. I was first introduced to the Office of Undergraduate Research through the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) during the summer after my freshman year. During that time, I worked as a full-time researcher in Dr. Teiya Kijimoto's developmental genetics laboratory, and I continued to work in Dr. Kijimoto's lab until my graduation in Summer 2021. My research project for SURE was centered around discovering how unrelated genes help to develop and maintain new traits in species. Specifically, we wanted to know how Hedgehog pathway genes and doublesex, a sex determining gene, are differentially regulated in maintaining horn sizes in *Onthophagus taurus* beetles. By participating in SURE, not only did I quickly learn many lab techniques and skills, but I was also provided the opportunity to become acquainted with many other undergraduate researchers and their work. It was then that I began to comprehend the important role undergraduates fill in the research community at WVU. This realization led me to apply and participate in the Honors EXCEL program as part of its first cohort of students.

As a student in the Honors EXCEL program, I have been working alongside the Office of Undergraduate Research and other hard-working undergraduates to re-establish Mountaineer Undergraduate Research Review (MURR). MURR is a multidisciplinary undergraduate research journal that accepts research articles from undergraduates for publication consideration. Like many other undergraduate research journals, MURR is published and led by undergraduate students. One of the overarching goals of my EXCEL project is to ensure that MURR is sustainable for future. With new students growing into leadership roles, I am ecstatic to say that we have accomplished our goals for sustainability, and I am excited to see where MURR's new leaders are able to take the journal.

Having been one of the leaders of MURR over the past 2 years has been an invaluable experience, and it has been of great benefit for my overall education. My experience with MURR has played a huge role in the direction of my future as I have accepted an offer to work with Science Advances as a member of their editorial staff. In conjunction with Science, Science Advances is an online open-access journal published by the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences, and it is one of the fastest growing journals in the country. I am very excited to be a part of their rapid publishing process, and I hope to share what I learn about their process with MURR in the future.



Savannah Hays

Growing up in West Virginia within rural Appalachia, a person with a college engineering degree is difficult to stumble upon and it is even more difficult to find a woman with a college engineering degree. As a first-generation female engineering student, I felt a little lost when it came to college preparation. As a rising senior biomedical engineering student at West Virginia University, I serve as the Vice President of the WVU Society of Women Engineers (SWE). I have been involved with WVU SWE since my first year of college and previously served as the secretary. For my Honors EXCEL project, I am developing a Morgantown SWENext Club for female high school students in the area to provide them with resources for college preparation and professional development in engineering careers. After the establishment of the Morgantown SWENext Club, I will expand my outreach to other parts of West Virginia. With this goal, I was selected as WVU's 2021 Newman Civic Fellow as I work to form more SWENext Clubs throughout West Virginia.

Outside of SWE, I have developed a passion for research. Coming into college, I was unaware of undergraduate research and how quickly I could get involved in it. At WVU, I started in the Research Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and also completed the Summer Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) following my first year of college. During this time, I worked with Dr. Shuo Wang in the Department of Chemical and Biomedical Engineering and the Department of Neuroscience studying facial processing in individuals with autism spectrum disorder. Throughout this time I was able to present poster presentations at various WVU symposiums and also at WV Undergraduate Research Day at the Capitol in 2020. These research experiences have inspired me to continue research into my professional career and become a physician-scientist.

Because of my passion for research and my undergraduate research experience, I joined MURR in 2019 as a STEM editor. My favorite part about this role is reviewing submissions from undergraduate students and learning about the research they are doing. Research is inspiring to me because it is a continuous learning cycle. Reading about the research being conducted by other undergraduate students around campus is astonishing.

I also serve as a tutor for the TestWELL Learning Center at WVU where I tutor in chemistry, mathematics, and engineering. In my free time, I love exploring the outdoors and spending time with my friends snowboarding at Wisp Resort or hiking at Coopers Rock.