Science Olympiad Brings Kentucky’s Brightest to WKU

The state finals for the 2015 Kentucky Science Olympiad were held Saturday, April 25th on the WKU campus. The overall winners were both from Russell, KY. Russell Independent High School - maroon team won in the high school (C) division and Russell Independent Middle School - maroon team won in the middle school (B) division.

The first place winners were decided by individual or small team competitions in a number of scientific fields represented by Ogden College such as Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Engineering, Geography, Geology and Physics. The winning schools will represent Kentucky at the Science Olympiad National Tournament hosted on May 15-16, 2015, by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

The success of this event is due to the dedication of middle and high school students and their teachers. The event would also not be possible without the outstanding volunteer work of the faculty, staff, and students at Western Kentucky University.
Alumni Focus:  
Dr. Melissa Dennison

Dr. Melissa Dennison is a 1980 WKU Chemistry graduate and a graduate from the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

Dr. Dennison is certified by the American Board of Pediatrics and has worked with Glasgow Pediatric Associates since 1997.

She is married to Dr. Kenneth Dennison and they have three children. She serves on the Western Kentucky University Board of Regents as well as the Ogden College Advisory Council.

Research Highlight

Dr. Chandra Emani of the Biology Department at WKU Owensboro will be working with Gatton Academy student Seth Marksberry during a research initiative this summer.

Seth will be working on developing a portable greenhouse substitute instrument to grow medicinally important plants such as basil, rice, and tobacco that will be pharmaceutical raw material for extracting the medicinal metabolites and developing suspension tissue cultures. Dr. Emani and Seth have a pilot prototype, and over the summer, they may achieve a rare distinction of a potential patentable product.

This experience will help Seth reach the goal of having a personal research project under the guidance of a professional scientist thereby giving him an insight into what it really means to be a scientist in a particular S.T.E.M. field.
I will be attending Kent State University on a teaching assistantship to pursue my doctorate in applied climatology. My time at WKU has been amazing and filled with lots of opportunities. Participating in the WKU Storm Chase in 2013 was the best two weeks of my life. I was also awarded the opportunity to intern with the Midwestern Regional Climate Center last summer.

This summer I will be participating in the WKU Storm Chase class in the midwest. I plan to go to graduate school in the future and will spend a year working in Bowling Green, applying for grad schools, and possibly volunteering for the National Weather Service if time allows. I am sad to be leaving WKU after four years of great experiences in and out of the classroom. I had the amazing opportunity to intern with NASA during their Student Airborne Research Program last summer. I used my research from the internship and completed an Honors CE/T titled Aerosol size distribution measurements during the 2014 NASA SRP Campagin over the Central Valley and Sierra Nevada Mountains in California. It has been a privilege to serve Ogden as a student ambassador.
Dr. Linda Brown will be appointed as the next Agriculture Department Chair effective July 1, 2015. Dr. Brown will provide the leadership necessary to continue building a culture that excels in teaching, research, student engagement, and service to the department, college, university, and broader communities. Dr. Brown will begin planning for her transition to Department Chair as the semester winds down.

Agriculture Turfgrass Management student Anderson Miller, pictured below, has options on the baseball field whether it be as a Major League player or working the turf. Anderson currently plays for the Hilltoppers, but has been contacted by nearly all MLB teams.

Anderson learned about the WKU turfgrass program from his cousin, a former WKU football player and Alum who now works for Advanced Turf Solutions. He liked the homelike atmosphere he felt when he visited WKU and the baseball facilities were exactly what he wanted.

“The turf industry is something I’ve been around my whole life whether it was cutting yards with my dad or helping get our high school field ready for games,” Anderson said. “The industry is a small world. Every conversation you have could end up being the pathway to your next job opportunity.”

His plans after baseball are to use the connections he has made during his career to stay in the baseball world and become head groundskeeper at the Major League Level.

The Agriscience and Education Field Day was held April 21st at the L.D. Brown Agricultural Exposition Center. Students from high schools in Kentucky and Tennessee attended to compete in events such as welding, dairy judging, demonstrations and much more. The Department of Agriculture has been hosting Field Day for over 30 years.

Congratulations to the new 2015-2016 Agriculture Ambassadors!

Dylan Gipson
Mikayla Grider
Thomas Murphy
Thomas Poole
Lindsay Poole
Molley Ratliff
Emily Scott
Tara Watkins

Congratulations to the new 2015-2016 Agriculture Ambassadors!
Dr. Brent Askins presented the following research in Little Rock, AR last week titled, “A Matter of Attitude, Helping Today’s Generation Achieve Success Through Work Ethic.” This work was presented jointly with Tammy Miller of Southeastern Georgia Technical College at the Association for Career and Technical Education Region IV conference held in April.

Pegah Kakavand, AMS Graduate Student, received a NSF Student Travel Award to attend the ASME Manufacturing Science and Engineering Conference (MSEC 2015), the premier international forum for applied research and industrial applications in manufacturing and design. Pegah’s research will also be featured in the KY-EPSCoR Annual Report.

Students from the WKU Habitat for Humanity campus chapter have actively participated in the Act! Speak! Build! week activities in the Warren County area over the past few weeks. Goals of the week are to engage members in the community to eradicate poverty housing, build awareness about poverty housing issues, and partner with the local affiliate to provide true understanding of how Habitat for Humanity works with partner families in our community and abroad.

Act! Speak! Build! week activities included:

- placing T-shirts displaying poverty housing facts on clothes lines around campus thereby creating awareness about real life issues around the world
- two fundraisers whose proceeds will go to Bowling Green/Warren County Habitat for Humanity to help the campus chapter sponsor a house
- worked on the build sight with the Bowling Green/Warren County Habitat for Humanity chapter
- passed out approximately 650 suckers with Habitat for Humanity facts taped to the sticks
- collection of approximately 4,500 gallons of latex paint in conjunction with Warren County hazardous waste pick up. The paint is going to Hardin County Habitat for Humanity for resale at their Habitat ReStore.

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Ms. April Butler (pictured at right with Dr. Bruce Schulte) is an outstanding scholar and golfer from Paducah, KY. She will graduate with a major in biology, a minor in chemistry, and holds a 4.0 GPA. This year April was the captain of the WKU women’s golf team and was named to the Conference USA All-Academic Team. She is WKU’s first (and so far only) Presidential Scholar student-athlete.

April has a long list of service activities, academic accolades, and professional development activities. In the pursuit of a career in medicine, April has served as an intern at the Four Rivers Internal Medicine center in Paducah and the Future Physicians Program.

The Department of Biology is proud of April’s accomplishments, and we wish her the best in the future!

Students from Morehead State University (pictured below, bottom) and Georgetown College (pictured below, top) recently visited the WKU Electron Microscopy Facility to obtain images of the viruses they discovered and characterized through the Small Genomes Discovery Program. This classroom-based research experience is funded through a Kentucky Biomedical Research Infrastructure Network (KBRIN) award to Dr. Rodney King and Dr. Claire Rinehart.

The goal of the Small Genomes Discovery Program is to use phage discovery, characterization, and genomics as the basis for original research for Kentucky’s novice undergraduate students. The phage population is large and diverse and likely represents the largest repository of novel DNA sequences on the planet and the relatively small size of phage genomes is well suited for bioinformatic dissection by undergraduate researchers.

Dr. Michael Smith has been chosen as a Faculty Leadership Fellow for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Andrea Sejdic has been selected as the winner of the Red Barrington Scholarship grant of $1,000 awarded by the Northern Kentucky Fly Fishers.

The Biology Department hosted a graduation reception for the seniors and students who will be leaving for professional schools. Over sixty people attended and more than twenty students won door prizes of WKU swag! Big Red was also in attendance and posed for pictures with all of those who wanted…..and also with some who didn’t! Dr. Schulte made a few remarks and celebrated the accomplishments of both undergrad and graduate students.

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Dr. Stuart Burris has been appointed as the next Chemistry Department Chair effective July 1, 2015.

The Taylor County, KY native is a 1993 WKU Alumnus who earned an ACS Certified BS in Chemistry. He obtained his PhD from North Carolina State University in 1998. He came back to the Hill in 2003 to teach in the Analytical and General Chemistry areas. His research focuses on Electroanalytical Chemistry and Surface Modification/Characterization utilizing electrochemical impedance spectroscopy and atomic force microscopy.

Dr. Burris has been married for 21 years to Glenda, who is also a WKU alumnus (Accounting, 1993), and they have two children, Lily and Nathaniel. In his spare time he enjoys scouting with Nathaniel and attending South Warren High School Spartan marching band events to see Lily perform. He also volunteers with Boy Scouts of America Troop 705 and the America Chemical Society.

The department is optimistic about its future progress under Dr. Burris’ leadership.

Dr. Hemali Rathnayake is a co-PI on a NASA EPSCoR Research AREA award. This is the first time a WKU Faculty member has been a PI on a major EPSCoR proposal. The work is so successful that the time has been moved up for the experiment to take place on the International Space Station by a full year. Only three to four percent of these proposals are funded.

Dr. Donald Slocum has been named to the Scientific Advisory Board for PROTEAF technologies.

Congratulations to all of the Chemistry Department graduates. Best wishes for a bright future!

It’s a glorious spring at the WKU Green River Preserve! You can see a hundred variations of green including the Green River, still running high and fast from early spring rains. The preserve has seen a record number of bald eagles on the river this year, and great blue herons are nesting on the Lawler Bend tract.

The Green River Preserve is featured in the latest issue of SOKY Happenings. The article includes some great photos by Dr. John Andersland. Look for it around Bowling Green.

Congratulations to the following Biology students who conducted research at the GRP and are now graduating from WKU: Greg Barren, Autumn Smith, Torey Gilkison, and Kenton Bottoms. Graduating this summer with GRP research projects are Megan Grandinetti and Victoria Peters.

The GRP is growing as a research destination for students from a wide range of locations working on a diverse range of projects. Graduate student Steven Micheletti from Washington State University will be studying salamander genetics at the preserve.

If you’d like to get involved at the GRP, visit our website at wku.edu/greenriver or e-mail greenriver@wku.edu.
Red Rock Business Advisors opened a second office in the Center for Research and Development here in Bowling Green last fall. Partner Chad Davis, a WKU alumnus, is passionate about the university and wants to partner with WKU students, graduates, and the community to help the company grow.

Red Rock Business Advisors is a full-service business advisory firm whose home office is located in Leesburg, VA. They provide strategic IT, financial, and operational consulting service to government, small business, and individual clients.

The company has grown immensely during the last couple of years and expanding into Bowling Green just made sense to Davis. “We hired four part-time staff, all WKU students or graduates. Two of the four, Seth Zurborg and Katie Sebree, have both accepted full time positions with us so we might need more part-time software developers. This is a great testament to the business model we had in mind and, more importantly, to the caliber of graduates WKU is producing,” Davis stated.

Computer Science students Christopher Goulet and Connor Brooks, pictured above, won first place in their poster session at the 2015 WKU REACH week event for their work on an Autonomous Mult-Rotor Vehicle. Connor was recently awarded a FUSE grant to continue this work. The students are working under the direction of Dr. Galloway.

The Computer Science Department is excited to announce that graduate student David Beverly, at right, has been accepted into the PhD program at the University of Idaho. David was a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the Computer Science department and wrote his thesis under the direction of Dr. David Erbach. Congratulations and best wishes, David, for a bright future!
WKU civil engineering students finished first overall in the 2015 Ohio Valley Student Conference March 25-28 at the University of Cincinnati and Cincinnati State Technical and Community College.

"The team was truly dedicated and unified, practicing hard to win the competition. I am extremely proud of them and their accomplishments."

-Dr. Shane Palmquist, steel bridge team faculty advisor

WKU’s concrete canoe and steel bridge teams won their competitions and qualified for national events this summer. WKU teams also won the balsa wood bridge and geotechnical engineering competitions.

In the concrete canoe races WKU swept all of the competitions, finishing first in men’s, women’s and co-ed sprint, and first in men’s and women’s slalom.

This is the third year in a row that the steel bridge team has qualified for the national competition. The team placed first in stiffness, display, and structural efficiency and second in construction speed, economy, and lightness. The national competition will be held May 23-24th at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

A total of 14 colleges and universities from Ohio, Kentucky, and Western Pennsylvania competed in civil engineering competitions.

WKU Standings:
Concrete canoe - 1st overall
Steel bridge - 1st overall
Balsa wood - 1st and 2nd
Geotechnical engineering - 1st
Surveying - 3rd overall
Concrete bat - 2nd

"WKU Civil Engineers Take First Place at Ohio Valley Regional Conference"

Left: WKU civil engineering students, faculty, and staff attended the 2015 Ohio Valley Student Competition at the University of Cincinnati.
Below, right: Concrete canoe team prior to races.
Lowerhand right corner: Steel bridge being load tested at the regional competition. Students pictured are Blake Adams, left, and Ben Mullins, right.
WKU Geoscience graduate student Connor Salley of Oliver Springs, TN was selected as the recipient of the Karst Waters Institute William L. Wilson Scholarship in Karst Science. Salley won the national award for his research proposal “Advancing Methods to Measure the Atmospheric Sink from Carbonate Weathering.”

A group of 15 students (pictured above) headed to the Ozarks last month to participate in an interdisciplinary field trip focused on geomorphology, karst environments, and water resources. The group visited various landscapes that included the St. Francois Mountains and Salem Plateau areas of southeastern Missouri and the northern Arkansas karst region as part of Spring 2015 courses taught by Dr. Jason Polk and Dr. Leslie North.

Distinguished Professor of Hydrogeology Dr. Chris Groves (at right) has accepted an invitation to represent the United States in the leadership of the Karst Commission of the International Geographical Union (IGU). Dr. Groves received the invitation letter from the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. He joins ten other scientists from as many countries on the Commission’s Steering Committee for a four-year term. The goal of the IGU is to promote geography by initiating and coordinating geographical research and education throughout the world.

Dr. John All (pictured below at left) gave this year’s keynote address at the annual Idea Festival Bowling Green. Dr. All survived a fall down a 70-foot crevasse in the Himalayas last May. He shared how his planning allowed him to endure a perilous climb that he undertook with 15 broken bones (including six vertebrae), a right arm that was ripped out of the shoulder, and internal and external bleeding.

Idea Festival is a one-day event featuring thinkers and innovators from a variety of fields: health, art, entrepreneurship, global issues, sustainability, etc. All of the speakers at IFBG are eager to share their innovative ventures and creative solutions to accomplish the initiative’s goal: spark innovation – one idea at a time.

The Hill has seen its share of extreme weather and climate events. With the addition of the College Heights Atmospheric Observatory for Students (CHAOS) WKU has fresh eyes to monitor hazardous conditions that pose a potential threat to the faculty, staff and students that are on the campus daily.

Back in 2014 Dr. Josh Durkee envisioned bringing weather monitoring to WKU, but as a student engagement endeavor that provides real-time weather observation specifically for the campus community during hazardous weather conditions. Dr. Durkee now serves as the Director of CHAOS.

The facility is also used as an introductory learning space for the Meteorology program. The department estimates that more than 500 students will pass through the CHAOS lab during the 2015-16 academic year to learn about the fundamentals of atmospheric science.

Dr. David Keeling traveled to Peru on Spring Break to extend ongoing research on the transportation systems of Latin America. As Associate Editor of the Journal of Transport Geography, Dr. Keeling aims to develop individual country transport analyses for each country in Latin America in order to focus more attention on the challenges facing these societies.
On April 20, 2015, faculty and students gathered at the WKU Faculty House for the Mathematics Department annual banquet. Departmental award winners were celebrated, Mathematics Ambassadors were recognized, and new Pi Mu Epsilon members were inducted (see photos at right). A great time was had by all!

Math Department Chair Bruce Kessler performs with his bluegrass group, the Mt. Victor Revue, (pictured below) at the “Kentucky Strings: Bluegrass Music & Beyond” event held April 16th. The event was part of WKU’s Cultural Enhancement Series.
Dr. Michael Carini, above, has been appointed as the interim Physics & Astronomy Department Chair effective July 1, 2015. Dr. Keith Andrew is retiring from the position.

Dr. Carini received his BA in Astronomy from Boston University and his PhD in Astrophysics from Georgia State University. He worked for five years with Computer Sciences Corporation as a Resident Astronomer and Data Center Technical Lead for NASA’s International Ultraviolet Explorer Satellite (IUE). He came to WKU in 1996 as a Research Associate in the Center for Automated Space Sciences (CASS) in the Physics and Astronomy Department. He became the department’s Assistant Professor in 1996.

Dr. Carini is married to Missi, an Art teacher at Warren East Middle School. They have four children, Adam, Steven, and twins Zachary and Samuel.

Student Stacy Hicks Hancock won the Chambliss Astronomy Achievement Student Award at the 225th meeting of the American Astronomical Society in Seattle, WA. This award is given to recognize exemplary research by undergraduate and graduate students who present at one of the poster sessions at the meetings of the AAS. Awardees are honored with a Chambliss medal or, in the case of Honorable Mention, a certificate. Stacy’s poster is titled “The Variable Comparison Stars in the field of the TeV Blazer 1ES 1959+650.”

A group of distinctly non-traditional students (pictured below) have been in the planetarium this spring, learning about the night sky and our Solar System. These students are among the 100+ members of the newly formed Society for Lifelong Learning. Designed for individuals 50 and over who recognize the importance of lifelong intellectual vitality and have a love of learning, the Society for Lifelong Learning offers opportunities for intellectual development, personal growth, cultural stimulation and social interaction. Dr. Frank Kersting, WKU retired professor and SLL Membership Relations Committee chair stated, “There are no grades, no papers and no pressure . . . just an opportunity to learn for the sake of learning and have fun in the process.”

Faculty, staff, and students of Ogden College may have noticed some distinctly younger students in the buildings during the week after Easter. These students were the 3rd through 6th graders attending Science Curiosity Investigation camp at Hardin Planetarium.

The theme of the Spring Break camp was “Atom and Ray.” Campers were presented with a series of experiences and explorations regarding radiation as seen through the eyes of two fictional characters, Adam and Rachel, who adopt the names “Atom” and “Ray” for their investigations.

Hardin Planetarium hosts SCI Camp for students in Warren County and Bowling Green Independent school districts while they are on Spring or Fall Breaks. The next SCI Camp will be offered during July 6-10, 2015. For more information and to pay the early bird registration fee of $120, visit wku.edu/hardinplanetarium.
Dr. Amy Brausch, pictured above, was awarded a KBRIN-IDeA grant titled, “The Development of Adolescent Non-suicidal Self-Injury and Suicide.” The grant will support a study assessing the development of self-harm behaviors in adolescents over a two-year period. The study will track self-harm behaviors and emotion regulation skills from a sample of high school freshmen from the region at multiple time points until the end of their sophomore year. Goals of the study include identifying what factors may trigger adolescents to begin to use self-harm; in those who do use self-harm, study how that behavior may change their ability to regulate emotions.

Dr. Amber Schroeder, pictured at right, was awarded an NSF REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates) along with Co-PIs Sharon Mutter and Jenni Redifer.

This program will provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to gain hands-on research experience while furthering our understanding of human behavior and cognition. All students will be expected to disseminate their research findings at a national or international conference following completion of the program, and students will be strongly encouraged to submit their research findings for increasing the likelihood that program participants will pursue graduate degrees and/or careers in psychology.

The theme of the REU site, which is focused on the integration of modern technology into psychological research, will not only allow students to gain exposure to working with cutting-edge technology not available in a number of psychology departments, but also to learn about research topics that are highly relevant to today’s society. As such the program will provide participants with a strong set of research skills along with a better understanding of modern issues being addressed in the field of psychology.

Dr. Stephen O’Connor, below right, is collaborating with Dr. Lori Johnson of Robley Rex VA Medical Center in Louisville, KY, Dr. David Jobes of the Catholic University of America, and Barbara Kaminer of the VA to conduct a study into the effectiveness of group therapy in addressing the “urge to die” component of suicidality. Veterans and current military are at increased risk of suicide when compared to their civilian peers. Experts such as these are trying to identify practical ways to address the problem such as group therapy which allows therapists to reach larger numbers of veterans on a lower budget.

The research team is in the final year of the study. They are currently analyzing the results and preparing them for publication. Preventing even one veteran suicide is a tangible result.

WKU’s Cognition Laboratory in Gary Ransdell Hall is seeking individuals ages 60 and over to participate in graduate thesis research on learning and memory. Volunteers will be compensated with a small monetary stipend for their participation and parking is available immediately adjacent to Gary Ransdell Hall. If you or anyone you know would be interested in participating, please call the Cognition Lab at 270-745-5288.

Danielle Lowry & Jessica Arnold
Psychological Sciences Graduate Students
Graduate Research Assistants, Cognition Laboratory
I always desired to travel to different parts of the world and meet with people of different cultures. My wishes came true on January 1st, 2015 when I made my first international travel to the United States.

I am an electronics engineering student from Pakistan Air Force-Karachi Institute of Economics & Technology University. In 2013, I applied to the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program. Soon I learned I was awarded a fully funded scholarship to study at Western Kentucky University. So I stepped out of my comfort zone and said goodbye to my friends and family leaving the people, culture and country I love.

Imagine having to adjust to a new culture while taking full credit college courses in a language that is not your own. Because I love to learn I chose a variety of different courses at WKU and embraced many new activities. I realized from my interactions with professors and other students that the educational system of the U.S. is quite different than Pakistan.

In addition to a full course load I participated in a lot of activities. I attended a basketball match. WKU students and faculty are all very proud of their great athletes. While at the game the sound was deafening at times, with all attending shouting, “Go tops! Go tops!” in unison. The roaring sound of all those shouts made my heart pound, but it also made me proud to be a Hilltopper.

The times I spent walking alone around the campus are memories I carry with me. I loved the peaceful environment, the beautiful buildings, and landscaping. Walking on campus gave me time to reflect on the experiences here at WKU. I came here as a stranger, but slowly fell in love with WKU and its people.

This year will be called the year of “first times” in my diary. I took self-defense classes which I loved. I lived in a dorm. I saw snow fall. I traveled to five different cities of the U.S. during spring break, which was tiring but fun. I experienced the Easter holiday. Some of my favorite memories are coloring Easter eggs and hunting for them in my professor’s home. I became a child again as two of my friends and I poked around my teacher’s apartment looking for colored eggs the “Easter Bunny” mischievously hid the night before.

It was different to see the degree of freedom of speech that people enjoy here, and it can be seen in everything - the educational system, relationships, dressing and government. I found people to be more expressive of their feelings here. Because of these extreme differences I did suffer a few days from homesickness. These days were difficult, but I knew that many college students have this feeling, too.

My time in the U.S. was full of new experiences and cultural moments that showed me the stark difference between our two cultures. But wisely stated these moments are actually “not better or worse, good or bad; they are simply different.” Therefore I embraced each moment taking in all that I could.

Most of the people I met were very kind and welcoming; I made friends of a lifetime. I faced a few people who saw my religious observation or culture as a challenge and decided to be dismissive or offensive to me. But I chose to accept these moments as part of my journey.

When I look back on this time I spent at Western Kentucky University as a Hilltopper, I will proudly tell myself, “Kainat, you did it!” I am forever changed for the better because of the challenges I faced and the friends I made while on my own for a semester in the United States at Western Kentucky University.