

Honors for USU Agricultural Education at Regional Conference

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A corps of Utah State University agricultural education students and faculty recently attended the Western Region Conference of the American Association for Agricultural Education (AAAE) in Anchorage, Alaska, and brought home top honors for their research.

The conference's Outstanding Research Poster Award was presented to Olivia Hile and Assistant Professor Tyson Sorensen. The research Hile presented was a pilot study leading up to her graduate thesis project. Her work on gifted students in agricultural education received the top score among the conference's poster presenters.

The People's Choice Research Poster Award went to USU graduate Amelia Miller, Professor Debra Spielmaker, Associate Professors Kelsey Hall and Rebecca Lawver, and Extension Assistant Professor Denise Stewardson.

Miller's poster on "Evaluating Michigan's FARM Science Lab as a Modality for Agricultural Literacy" was the crowd favorite among all participants. The lab is a 40-foot mobile classroom that travels to elementary schools in Michigan teaching STEM lessons.

"It's always exciting to see a student's 'Aha!' moment," Miller said. "The Farm Science Lab gives them a different opportunity to experience agriculture. Students [gain] knowledge about agriculture, and teacher's said that agriculture can be a good example of teaching science in a practical manner."

Miller now works as promotion and education program specialist at the Michigan Farm Bureau. She thanked her mentor, Spielmaker for guidance in completing a master of science degree in agricultural Extension and education, which she received in May after doing the required coursework online and completing her thesis.

According to the AAAE, just 45 percent of the 67 research posters submitted were accepted. Three of the final 30 were submitted by individuals from USU.

The conference's Outstanding Research Paper Presentation, was awarded to Nicole Hopkins, Michelle Burrows, Lawver and Sorensen. Hopkins is an undergraduate in the agricultural education program, and her research focused on agriculture teachers' spouses and their perspectives on the career. She will begin student teaching spring semester.

"One thing that I thought was cool was that 35 percent of spouses have an influence on the teachers' career choice, so they do have an influence on whether or not the teacher decides to stay in the profession," Hopkins said. "We also found out that 72 percent of spouses knew little to nothing about ag education before they met their spouse, and a little over half didn't participate in school-based agriculture education."



Professor Debra Spielmaker (left) mentored recent USU graduate Amelia Miller in agricultural literacy research that received the People's Choice Research Poster Award.



Faculty and students from USU's School of Applied Sciences, Technology and Education earned several honors for their research at a recent AAAE Conference. Among those attending (L-R): Lendel Narine, Michelle Burrows, Nichole Hopkins, Kelsey Hall, Rose Judd-Murray, Debra Spielmaker, Rebecca Lawver, Tyson Sorensen and Amelia Miller.

Hopkins' research was supported by an Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities Grant from USU's Office of Research and mentors Sorensen and Lawver, and she gave an oral presentation about the project at the conference.

For more information about USU's School of Applied Sciences, Technology & Education, visit aste.usu.edu.

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