

Presenting Research at a Conference: The Student Perspective

The following is an interview with USJ undergraduate student, Maaham Jafri.

What conference did you present your research at?

- I presented at the NE-1 TriBeta Conference.

How did you learn about the conference?

- My research instructor/advisor, Dr. Reed, informed me about a couple of different presenting opportunities, such as Symposium Day, the TriBeta Conference and the CVS/ACS conference. Because my research was more biology based, we decided to stick with the TriBeta Conference. This Conference was completely virtual, and we used a webpage called Gather Town to present.

What was the project that you presented at the conference?

- I presented on my dry-lab research about 2 major genes present in four female cancers (Breast, Cervical, Endometrial, and Ovarian) and their outcomes on the severity of the cancer. The title of my presentation/paper was: "Evaluation of the Prevalence and Nature of PTEN and PIK3CA Mutations in Female Cancers".

What was your process for conducting the research that led to the presentation? Did you have a faculty mentor?

- Initially, I expressed my interest about learning more about cancer to both of my advisors and learned that Dr. Reed does a lot of cancer research. That semester, most/all of us were completely online, so Dr. Reed approached me with an opportunity to do research from my own home.
- My research was completely dry lab. I was using online resources, such as Genecards, cBioPortal, PubMed, and American Cancer Society, among many others to gather data about the two genes and how they responded in each of the cancers.
- Dr. Reed also runs TriBeta and informed me of the conference coming up, and Dr. Crandall approached us with a couple more opportunities. That's when we decided to present at the TriBeta conference.

How did you feel before, during, and after presenting at the conference?

- I was really nervous about presenting. I had never presented in a conference before and was always anxious to even present in front of a classroom. A conference was a big deal. I decided to write myself a script that I would use when presenting. During the conference, I realized it wasn't that scary, partly because I was online, and mostly because all of the people who stopped by my presentation were genuinely interested and excited to learn about what I was researching! After the conference, I was more confident in my ability to present and made so many mental notes on how to do better.

Would you recommend other students present at external conferences?

- I definitely recommend students present at external conferences. It increases public speaking ability, and it was a great experience. You also get to meet a lot of new people with the same interests and build so many connections!

Are you planning to do any further research on this or another project?

- I am currently researching with Dr. Zingales in the Chemistry Department. We are trying to look for another route to make oxazinones and make the never before made molecule, 1,3-oxazinone, and test it for anti-cancer and anti-Alzheimer's properties!