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**Delta State students shine at 2025 Mississippi IDeA/EPSCoR Conference**

**CLEVELAND, Miss. —** Delta State University students took center stage at the 2025 Mississippi IDeA/EPSCoR Conference, presenting original research and participating in statewide scientific discussions at the Gertrude C. Ford Student Union on the University of Mississippi’s Oxford campus on July 24.

Environmental science and biology major Olivia Pharr presented a poster on the *“Testing of Manmade Chemicals on Mississippi Delta Plants,”* based on research led by Dr. Nina Baghai-Riding, professor of biology and environmental science. Chemistry major Erick Manriquez presented his project titled *“Developing an Interactive Cloud-Based Learning Module for Vibrational Energy Calculations in Molecules Using Jupyter Notebooks for the National Institutes of Health.”*

Two biology students—Peyton Bevan, a McNair Scholar, and Xavier Stanford, a participant in the Mississippi IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (Mississippi INBRE)—attended the conference and took part in multiple sessions. Mississippi INBRE, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), supports biomedical research and student development in states that historically receive limited federal research funding through the Institutional Development Award (IDeA) program. EPSCoR (Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) is a complementary initiative that supports research capacity-building in underfunded states.

Stanford called the event a “huge success,” adding, “Watching other students present gave me a real head start. I really enjoyed it—it was a great experience.”

Bevan reflected on the value of the presentations, saying, “I gained insight into cutting-edge scientific advancements, including the 3D printing of carbon materials and development of polymers using alternative atomic structures. These discoveries broadened my understanding and inspired me to think more creatively about biomedical research.”

Pharr said, “I enjoyed meeting and talking to students and faculty from other institutions and sharing our research from DSU. I learned so much just by listening to other student presentations.”

DSU faculty also made strong contributions to the conference. Dr. Joseph Bentley, professor of chemistry and chair of the Division of Mathematics and Sciences, and Dr. Chris Jurgenson, associate professor of biochemistry, presented *“Development of Cloud-Based Learning Resources,”* a project funded by the NIH and supported by Amazon Web Services and GitHub to enhance accessibility in science education.

Baghai-Riding gave a presentation on the *“Testing of Manmade Chemicals on Mississippi Delta Plants in Bolivar County.”* Dr. Severine Groh, associate professor of biology, shared strategies for *“Designing Undergraduate Research Projects to Advance a Faculty Research Program.”*

All three—Baghai-Riding, Groh, and Jurgenson—also served as poster judges during the conference.

DSU further expanded its research leadership through its participation in the launch of the Mississippi Emerging Research Institutions Council (MERIC)—a new alliance of primarily undergraduate institutions working to expand collaborative research and improve funding access. MERIC is supported by the Mississippi Research Alliance and institutional partners across the state.

Jurgenson was elected chair-elect of MERIC, positioning DSU as a key player in this new statewide initiative. “I’m honored to serve as chair-elect for MERIC. We hope to build this alliance and increase participation in research across Mississippi,” he said.

Bentley added, “It’s always an honor to represent Delta State and show how well we compete in research. I enjoyed meeting others doing great work across the state.”

DSU representatives also reconnected with Meredith Seely, a DSU biology/pre-med major currently serving as a Mississippi INBRE Scholar at Mississippi State University. Seely presented her summer research with confidence, earning praise from DSU faculty and peers.

From student posters to faculty presentations and institutional leadership, Delta State University’s presence at the 2025 Mississippi IDeA/EPSCoR Conference underscored its growing role in Mississippi’s research ecosystem. For more information about Delta State’s Division of Math and Sciences, visit their website at [www.deltastate.edu/nursing-health-sciences/mathematics-sciences/](https://www.deltastate.edu/nursing-health-sciences/mathematics-sciences/).

Cutline: Chemistry major Erick Manriquez (R) and Dr. Joseph Bentley, chair of the Division of Mathematics and Sciences at the 2025 Mississippi IDeA/EPSCoR Conference.

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**About Delta State University:**Delta State University is a four-year public institution whose nearly 2,700 students come from most U.S. states and more than 45 countries. Acknowledging its beginning as a teacher’s college, the University sustains excellence in teacher education while continuing to expand offerings in traditional as well as unique fields of study. Programs such as those available through the Delta Music Institute, the Commercial Aviation Department, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Geospatial Information highlight the University’s commitment to meeting the evolving needs of the students it serves with world-leading, industry-acclaimed programs. Situated in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, Delta State offers top-notch academic programs in business, arts, sciences, nursing, education, and more. DSU Athletics has won 14 national championships, 70 conference championships, and 37 regional titles.