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## **Lindenwood Microbiology Students Present at State Conference**

**December 13, 2024**

In November, three Lindenwood microbiology students traveled to Fulton, Missouri for the state branch of the American Society for Microbiologists' annual meeting, with Associate Professor Dr. Chad Welsh. At the conference, Lindenwood students Olivia Fotiadis, Brooklyn Bumbales, and Ada Sardaña Sambola presented their multi-year individual research projects in which Fotiadis won second prize.

Individual research is a unique experience for Lindenwood students. Faculty works with each student to determine a topic that fits their own interests, allowing the students to drive the research themselves. Welsh contrasts this to other universities in which students tend to play a small role in a set ongoing project. Fotiadis, Bumbales, and Sardaña picked topics that relate closely to their career aspirations and intend to further continue their research. Welsh noticed this difference at the conference "the majority of the student posters, whether they're undergraduate or graduate, multiple people worked on that project. Lindenwood students: Ada, Brooklyn and Olivia. They were the only students on their posters."

Each student found research to be a challenging yet rewarding experience. Bumbales said, "It made me figure out how to do things on my own and rely on myself to get things done. It also gave me a sense of pride in knowing that all of my work is my own research and design, with the help of my advisor," with Sardaña adding "I encountered challenges that tested my problem-solving abilities such as navigating setbacks when an experiment didn't have the expected results or figuring out the next step to take. These moments were sometimes frustrating, but they taught me resilience and adaptability, skills that are essential for any professional career in science."

Fotiadis's presentation, Examination of bacterial communities in soil beneath decaying organic matter and the effect of insect succession (Preliminary Report) was the culmination of two years of research that she says is not yet finished. Fotiadis plans to continue this project into the spring semester, believing that it will make a contribution to forensic science, a field she hopes to pursue as a career. Despite presenting an ongoing project, the judges at the conference deemed her worthy of second place. Fotiadis attributes the award to her detailed plan to complete the project, outlining the contribution she hopes it makes to the industry.

Speaking on the event and her research, Fotiadis said "before this, I hadn't done anything like this. It was so new to me. I feel like I kind of came into my own shoes a little bit and realized that we all have something to offer, and you should showcase that."

All three students described presenting at the conference as a rewarding experience and shared recommendations that future students consider taking on their own projects to present in future years' conferences.

Welsh says he plans to take the group to the Missouri Academy of Science's 2025 meeting, where the students will be able to present their reports to a larger audience. He hopes that success there will propel the three to the national conference in the summer.

