Student Research Conference Preview 2021

VFTH

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WKU’s rich history of scholarly engagement for students will be on display this weekend at the annual Student Research Conference.

The conference has been going on since 1970 and it continues providing research opportunities to students as Amy Bingham shows us in this week’s View from the Hill.

“So, I’ve been involved in the sport of jump rope since seventh grade. I started competing when I was in eighth grade.”

When deciding on a research topic as a sophomore, Senior mechanical engineering major Caroline Camfield looked no further than her longtime love of jumping rope.

“I was mainly looking for ways that jump rope could be used to teach engineering and help jumpers kind of like find connection between something they already love to do and STEM.”

Focusing on the science of the sport as well as the speed variables, Caroline says it was an opportunity to get more research on an activity that not much is known about.

“The type of jump rope I was looking at was speed jumping, like looked at different handle types, different rope types.”

 “My research is focusing on COVID-19 and air pollution here in Kentucky.”

The shutdown is what prompted the research topic for Gatton senior Sarah Hartman.

 “I took air pollution levels from before and after the start of the pandemic and the start of the shutdown and I basically compared them to see if there was a decrease in air pollution levels.”

Pulling data from the EPA dating back to 2016, Hartman was able to run some tests and see if, in fact, our air was easier to breath.

“The two pollutants that I specifically looked at were nitrogen dioxide and sulfur dioxide. When you look at the graphs and you look at the results, the levels do go down from the previous four years.”

This research is all music to the ears of Provost Cheryl Stevens who came to WKU as Dean of Ogden College after spending years as a chemistry professor.

 “For the sciences in particular, it’s THE most important thing we can have students do. The more faculty who do this with students, the better off we are.”

And she points out that research serves as a great retention tool for students.

“Because those kids then identify with a lab, they identify with a group or a discipline and they keep coming back because they love that and they love that connection.”

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

The virtual conference opens tomorrow with a keynote speaker from John Hopkins University to discuss the Covid 19 vaccine development and deployment.

This will mark the second year in a row the conference has been held virtually.

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