

The VJAS Voice

Written by Students, for Students

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Greetings, Young Scientists!

As the school year rapidly approaches, VJAS and VAS officers are working hard to make VJAS 2016 successful! We are working towards a more streamlined system. In this edition of the VJAS *Voice*, we recapped VJAS 2015, highlighted some officers' personal experiences, and provided many reasons for you to join VJAS or the VJAS Student Government! Look for the VJAS Voice (published quarterly) and at the VJAS website to stay updated!

Moreover, we would like to welcome our new student government representatives:

Mr. Ben Rhoades as President,
Mr. Kevin Zhan as Vice President,
Miss Reona Pereira as Secretary, Historian;
Miss Yashodhara Varma as Editor-in-Chief, Communications Liaison;
Miss Kayla Holston as Officer Alumna,
and Mr. Eric Teichner and Mr. Liam Spiers as Regional Directors.

We look forward to more incredible research and science in the upcoming year!



Retrospective Voice: A Reflection of VJAS 2015

This year's Virginia Junior Academy of Science Research Symposium, held at James Madison University, was a success! We received a substantial number of papers (over 900) from student authors from all over the state! Apart from incredible research and presentations, there were excellent speakers such as Drs. Stephanie Stockwell and Eric Pyle. Many students attended these lectures and enjoyed dinner with the scientists, illustrating that VJAS participants are truly interested in science and the pursuit of knowledge.

Furthermore, the quality of the research was some of the best we have ever seen. The papers varied in topic and were presented and judged by passionate scientists, sparking discussion and fueling interest around campus. Congratulations, awardees!

Apart from science, the accommodations from JMU helped students unwind. From the dance to the meals to the campus itself, everything ran smoothly and efficiently. As a participant, I can attest to the fact that this made the symposium *very* enjoyable.

This symposium was indeed a success, but we are always looking for ways to improve. If you have any suggestions, please let us know! Finally, I want to thank those who applied, presenters, sponsors, judges, VJAS government and staff, and JMU for making VJAS 2015 a success! We look forward to seeing you next year at the University of Mary Washington and encourage you to conduct more innovative research! ■ –YV, KZ, KH

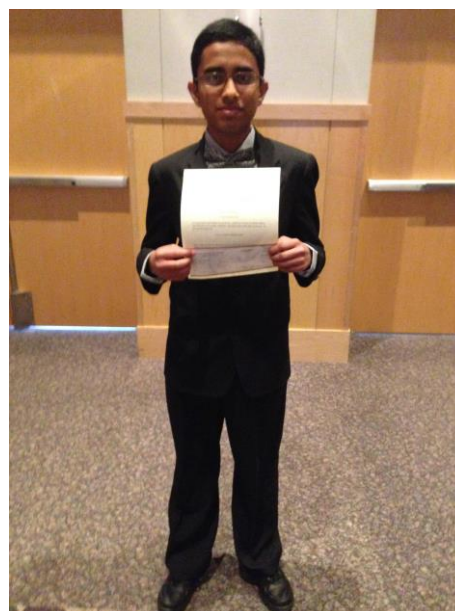




Winners' Circle: Top Award Winners

Congratulations to all of the category and special award winners at this past year's VJAS symposium! Winners varied by the schools they were representing and the grade levels in which they were. Notable awardees include Valentina Lohr (Thomas Jefferson High School for Math, Science & Technology), Shannon Miklandric (Mathematics & Science High School at Clover Hill), and Nikhil Chandravel (Tuckahoe Middle School). All of these researchers won first place in their respective categories, as well as multiple Special Awards. Many others researchers also won multiple awards. Further commendation goes to Valentina and Shannon as they won the highest honor of being nominated to present their research projects at the 2016 American Junior Academy of Science in Washington, D.C.

While many of these special awards are given based upon a student's performance in his/her respective category, some of the most selective, subject-specific accolades must be applied to prior to the starting of the symposium. Examples include the Cancer Research Awards, the Infectious Diseases Award, the Speleological Society Award (given for outstanding research addressing karst or topics related to the study of cave environments), the Bethel High School Scholarship (\$1,000 scholarship), and the Henry Mackenzie Environmental Scholarship (VEE \$5,000 scholarship). Applications for these and other awards are found in the back of the VJAS Handbook. We hope to see more students apply for these prizes in the coming years! ■ –KZ, YV





Looking Ahead: 2016 VJAS Symposium



UNIVERSITY OF
MARY WASHINGTON

where great minds get to work

We are happy to announce that the 75th Annual Virginia Junior Academy of Science Research Symposium and Meeting will be held at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA from May 17 to 20, 2016!

No need to fear, young scientists; despite the new surroundings, this upcoming symposium will be run following the precedence of the others! We hope you all will have a great time at the University of Mary Washington in May!

Use the hashtag #VJASatUMW to express and share your excitement for the forthcoming meeting on Twitter and other social media!



Q&A: How Do I Get Started As a Student?

For many of us, shortening summer days and cooling temperatures signify that the school year is approaching rapidly. What better time than now to start thinking about research projects? Although the next VJAS symposium may seem to be in the distant future, May will come rolling in before you expect it to, so be prepared.

One of the most frequently asked questions is, “Why should I, a young, ambitious scientist, apply to participate in VJAS?” There are many reasons to join VJAS, including scholarship opportunities, membership into the prestigious American Academy of Science, and being published in an established scientific research journal. Furthermore, presenters can network with researchers and scientists from around the state. Who knows, someone who from a part of the state you have never been to could one day become one of your best friends!

To get started as a student, you first need to think of a project and conduct research. Rather than coming up with a fancy, complicated project with the intention of capturing the judges’ eyes and winning big, invest in something you are interested in. True scientists pursue their passions and aim to contribute to the betterment of society; that is the real reason behind research. Additionally, more often than not, judges can sense genuine enthusiasm and will reward presenters for it.

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After coming up with a topic to delve deeper into, seek permission from teachers and parents as these parties will be your main supporters. Next, go onto the VJAS website and look at the resources there. Suggestions and safety guidelines can be found in the VJAS Handbook.

Then comes the most exciting part of this process: actual experimentation. Remember to keep note of all procedures and do not fear failure; your hypothesis does not necessarily have to be supported by your results. What is most important about this process is that you learned something new. If you need a grant to pay for supplies, you may apply for one using the application in the Handbook Appendix.

Research papers are due in February and are turned in hard copies along with the appropriate forms. Before submitting your paper, make sure that it is in the proper format and fits all of the guidelines set by the Handbook (I know the Handbook is extremely thorough, but it is extremely crucial that you will not get disqualified). A researcher may enter VJAS through either a school membership or an individual membership; membership applications are due in early January. A more detailed list of suggestions will be coming out in the later issues of the *Voice*. As for now, we hope that you all will have fun getting started on those experiments! ■
–KZ, YV



Student Voice: VJAS Personal Experiences

With the school year approaching soon, we thought it was a great time to reflect upon past VJAS experiences and asked some of our student government workers detail theirs. Secretary Reona Pereira and Regional Director Eric Teichner graciously shared their reflections.

Eric Teichner:

My past three years at the Virginia Junior Academy of Science have truly been a great experience! I became involved with VJAS my freshman year of high school after I completed independent research regarding algae. The process of doing independent research is twofold in my opinion: the first involves the actual doing of the science and the second involves communicating the results to other scientists and even the general public. Before my first freshman symposium, I was unaware of the many opportunities out there to actually get involved with the scientific community! It was only after I began to do substantial investigating that I found VJAS and all the wonderful benefits of sharing scientific advancements with the community. I highly suggest that everyone reading this article who has performed scientific research consider submitting your manuscript to VJAS. At each symposium, you will meet a gamut of young scientists with like interests and even eat in a college dining hall! How awesome is that? Truly, it is a one of a kind experience. As your regional director, I hope to see you in May at the University of Mary Washington!



Reona Pereira:

Do you enjoy leadership experiences as well as being part of VJAS? Well then, being part of the student government is a great opportunity for you. There are many positions you can apply to; President, Vice President, Secretary, Editor-in-Chief, Communications Liaison, and various Regional Directors. So how do you apply? It's quite simple: fill out the forms found in the VJAS Website, write an election speech, and mail it to the director, Susan Booth. If you are chosen to present your speech to the VJAS Committee, then you are one step closer to being part of our student government!

What does a member of the student government get to do? We meet with the rest of the VJAS Committee a few times a year to discuss the various ups and downs of the science fair as well as coming up with solutions to better VJAS. We help the committee by planning out how to get

VJAS out there, getting more people involved, writing the VJAS Voice, figuring out ways to make the whole experience better for our peers each year, etc.

Though this is my first year being part of the student government, I've already learned a lot of helpful skills as secretary. The secretary is in charge of writing the minutes of the meetings, sending emails back and forth, working on sending documents to everyone, answering any questions about VJAS, participating in the discussions to bring forth new ideas, and helping out by getting everything published and ready for the new year. Because of this, I have learned to pace out my work to get things done quicker, my discussion and communication skills have become much better as well.

I found out about the student government from the director herself while I was emailing her about my project. I wasn't selected to present and I wanted to know why and if there was anything I could do to still be part of VJAS. After the 2014 symposium, I had absolutely loved the whole idea of the science fair. Staying in the dorms, presenting your project to your peers and a panel of judges, and answering questions made VJAS seem like more than just a science fair for teens. So when I found out that I could still be part of it with this wonderful opportunity, I immediately sent out my forms and applied for the job. I was ecstatic to find out that I was selected and even now I'm extremely glad to be part of the student government.

If you are thinking of applying, then stop thinking and start doing! Fill out the forms and send them as soon as possible
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because we would love for you be part of the VJAS student government. Also don't forget to apply to the science fair too, it's soon going to be time to start thinking of a new project! ■ –ET, RP



2016 VJAS Student Officers

President
Ben Rhoades

Vice President
Kevin Zhan

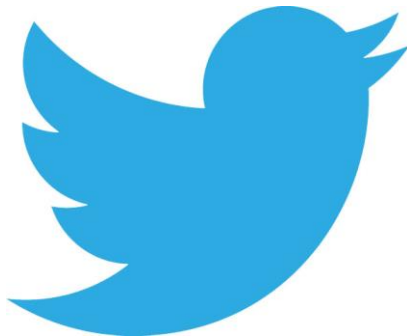
**Secretary and
Historian**
Reona Pereira

**Editor-in-Chief and Communications
Liaison**
Yashodhara Varma

Officer Alumna
Kayla Holston

Regional Directors
Eric Teichner and Liam Spiers

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Do not forget to share your voice with us at vjasvoice@gmail.com!

