

2019 The Undergraduate Award for Excellence in Chemistry by a First Generation Student –
Ashley Hoffmaster

It is a difficult task to summarize the extensive achievement of this First Generation student! In addition to her three page Personal Statement, three other nominators wrote multi-page, comprehensive letters of accolades including a list of manuscripts and presentations in which Ashley was prominently featured.

There is only one section in her statement regarding the challenge of being a first generation student. Instead, she writes about being “galvanized” when her problem-solving skills were pushed to their limits. She talks about “her first research group”, a collaborative team of professors, postdocs, undergraduate and graduate students at Fairmont State University (FSU) and West Virginia University (WVU), during her General Chemistry course, her first year at the FSU. She discusses her progression from study of “micellular aggregation and behavior of surfactants” to having an opportunity to access instrumentations (e.g., potentiostats and glove boxes, & etc.) to learning “synthetic methods to fabricate porous carbon nanofoams”, at Naval Research Laboratory.

During her senior year, Ashley had the opportunity to work as a full-time intern, for 10 months at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) in Washington D.C. Her then supervisor states that “Ashley commuted 4 hours per day while working 40 hours a week at NRL and taking an online course through FSU”. Yet, she arrived every single day “eager to work and learn” and revealing a high level of commitment and professionalism!

Ashley took part, as a lead experimentalist in two main projects, during those 10 months. Her first project involved, “Solution processable conducting polymers for macroscale high-rate energy-storage devices.” Second project had to do with the synthesis and characterization of carbon nanofoams, also for high-performance energy-storage devices. The titles of the manuscripts and the presentations represent a remarkable degree of collaboration and maturity.

In addition, two professors from Fairmont State University where Ashley is currently a graduating senior tout her integrity, excellence in communication skills (both verbal & written), and well balanced organization skills. They also mention her ability to work and help other students.

Ashley states that she is passionate about developing “effective teaching strategies” for students with various learning styles. She is poised to pursue a PhD in Chemistry and Chemical Education.