

Tulane inspires future scientists at Women and Girls in Science Symposium

March 18, 2024 9:00 AM Tulane Today
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A panel of researchers spoke to high school students from across St. Tammany Parish at the inaugural Women and Girls in Science Symposium. From left to right: Leslie Tate, assistant director of communications; Jennifer Manuzak, assistant professor of microbiology and immunology; Cecily Midkiff, lab supervisor; Dr. Lara Doyle-Meyers, veterinarian and associate professor of medicine; Carolina Allers, research assistant professor; Nadia Golden, assistant director of research administration; and Vicki Traina-Dorge, professor of microbiology and immunology. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

In celebration of International Women's Day, the Tulane National Primate Research Center (TNPRC) hosted its inaugural Women and Girls in Science Symposium on Friday, March 8.

The symposium served as a platform for celebrating and empowering high school girls who excel in science and have expressed interest in pursuing a career in research. Handpicked by their high school science teachers, students in grades 10-12 from across St. Tammany Parish were welcomed to the evening event alongside their parents and mentors.

Research and veterinary scientists representing various career stages and professional roles within the TNPRC delivered personal presentations spotlighting their earliest inspirations in science, educational journeys and encountered challenges, and imparted final words of advice to the next generation of aspiring scientists.

Jennifer Manuzak, an assistant professor of microbiology and immunology at the TNPRC, touched on the perils of perfectionism and encouraged students to view mistakes as valuable opportunities for personal growth and exploration. With a touch of humor, she reminded the audience that science isn't always straightforward, quipping, "If science were easy, it would just be called 'search,' not 're-search.'"

Throughout the symposium recurring themes emerged, including the importance of resilience, finding one's voice, adaptability in the face of change and the value in creating a robust support network.

Attendees expressed gratitude for the forum's intimate approach, offering insights not only into professional achievements but also the personal and professional challenges overcome by the presenters along the way.

Following the presentations, attendees were treated to a reception where they had the chance to mingle with more members of the TNPRC research community, including graduate students and doctoral candidates. Each attendee wore a nametag displaying their specific science interests, sparking lively conversations and fostering meaningful exchanges.

Leslie Tate, assistant director of communications at the TNPRC and an event organizer, shared the genesis of the symposium, inspired by her observations. "I

noticed an increasing number of young women visiting the center on high school field trips, expressing a growing interest in science careers. Simultaneously, I observed a trend in our news stories spotlighting some of the exceptional women at the TNPRC. We felt compelled to create a space where these two groups could intersect."

The Women and Girls in Science Symposium was made possible through the generous support of the Joe W. and Dorothy Dorsett Brown Foundation, dedicated to empowering aspiring female research scientists by providing financial support and networking opportunities.



St. Scholastica Academy senior Sameeha Hussain and her mother Shakeela Hussain spoke with Mandeville High School sophomore Amelie Golden and Tchefuncte Middle School student Iris Gilman at the reception. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)