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Modeling & Simulation – Interdisciplinary Student Succeeds!

Lydia Wigglesworth-Ballard is all smiles when I catch-up with her on a sunny, March day for this interview about her inspiring academic journey. And she has every reason to smile! Lydia will graduate this May from ODU with a PhD in Health Services Research with a concentration in modeling and simulation in infection control. A student of ODU Biological Sciences Professor, Holly Gaff, Lydia was one of the first recipients of ODU's Modeling & Simulation Graduate Assistantships and successfully completed her research in Health Services while pursuing an interdisciplinary graduate certificate in Modeling & Simulation in the Health Sciences. If this sounds like a lot to juggle, it is! Lydia's research was interdisciplinary and highly collaborative, and she embraced this innovative and rewarding approach every step of the way. The focus of Lydia's dissertation research is on the use of modeling and simulation techniques to enhance and improve training in infection control. She was one of only seven students selected to represent Old Dominion University at the 7th Annual Virginia Council of Graduate Schools' (VCGS) Graduate Student Research Forum in 2012. Lydia credits her enthusiasm and success to strong mentoring and support from her academic advisor, Dr. Gaff, and from the other members of her committee especially Dr. Ginger Watson-Papelis, a professor of STEM Education and Professional Studies. Lydia's advice to students interested in interdisciplinary research: "Be willing to step out of your comfort zone and don't be afraid to ask for help. The most important lessons I learned were to keep an open mind, to be prepared to gather as much information on my own as I could in my disciplines of interest, to lay out a plan, but be ready to have some flexibility."



Lydia with her committee after her successful dissertation defense

Pictured left to right: Dr. Scott Sechrist, ODU College of Health Sciences; Lydia Wigglesworth; (on screen) Dr. Eli Perencevich, University of Iowa, Carver College of Medicine; Dr. Holly Gaff, ODU Biological Sciences; Dr. Ginger Watson-Papelis, ODU STEM Education and Professional Studies.