

Good afternoon, I am excited to be here and grateful for this wonderful luncheon that has been provided for us.

Representing Presbyterian College and receiving such a prestigious award is a humbling experience for which I am honored.

I was in Fayetteville, Arkansas when I received the call from Dr. Askew letting me know that I received the award. Back in March, I was offered the opportunity to participate in a National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at the University of Arkansas thanks to my supportive professors and past research at Presbyterian College. For the duration of the summer, I worked with a graduate student on a nanoscience project involving 2-dimensional materials, which include graphene – the material that was the focus of the 2010 Nobel Prize in physics.

I developed a close comradery with a graduate student named Arash, as we worked many hours in the lab. Because I was in the lab when I found out I received the award, Arash was the first person I let know. To my surprise, he was as excited as I was, and ensured that he let every other graduate student know his undergrad was the “student of the year.”

Being offered the chance to participate in an REU was an incredible experience, but I would have never had that chance if I did not attend an institution like Presbyterian College. My first interactions with Presbyterian College occurred through the Clinton Science Olympiad Program where I practiced to compete in many different events, several of which were coached by PC faculty. One of my coaches was Dr. Michael Rischbieter, who many of you may know as one of the recipients of the SCICU 2018 Excellence in Teaching awards.

I continued to participate in Science Olympiad and caught a glimpse of the truly unique community that exists here at Presbyterian College. It also didn't hurt that one of my closest friends from grade school is Dr. Beasley's son! Later, my mother would begin working at Presbyterian College as a custodian. I also briefly worked as a custodian here before and a short time after starting classes my freshman year. I spent many days at PC, and I met many of the faculty and staff through my mother. As my senior year of high school approached, I realized that I valued an education where I could be a member of a tightly knit community that would treat me as a person instead of a number – and that place was PC.

Presbyterian College, and its professors, like Dr. Beasley and Dr. Owens, who I invited today, have never ceased to support me and help me achieve my goals. From a research experience

through NASA to receiving this award today, I have been encouraged by a one-of-a-kind community that I will always cherish. That said, I would not be able to attend PC if it was not for the gracious support provided to me through the South Carolina Tuition Grant Program. It is important that students at independent institutions in South Carolina continue to receive this support so that they can experience the value that these organizations provide. I will continue to advocate for South Carolina independent colleges as I continue my education and hope many more students have similar experiences to my own. Next year, I hope to attend graduate school to attain a PhD in Materials Science & Engineering.

I would like to thank Dr. Beasley and Dr. Owens for attending and helping me so much throughout these years. I would like to thank Dr. Joy Smith as well, who helped guide me through my freshman year here at PC. Finally, I would like to thank my mother. Of all the admirable people I have had the joy of meeting in my life, my mother is my biggest inspiration and supporter. She has always encouraged me to attain higher education, and I would not be the person nor student I am without her. Finally, I would like to thank SCICU for this incredible award. Thank you.