

PRESS RELEASE

KEELY W. MCQUAIN NAMED 2024 DISTINGUISHED SENIOR AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLUMBUS, Ohio—Keely W. McQuain of North Royalton, Ohio, has been named a 2024 Distinguished Senior at The Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES).

“The Distinguished Senior Award is the most prestigious undergraduate award in CFAES and honors top graduating seniors on the Ohio State Columbus campus,” said Ann Christy, CFAES professor and associate dean for academic programs. “The 23 award recipients exemplify the CFAES mission in areas such as academics and scholarship, research and innovation, service and involvement, and influence and leadership.”

McQuain is a plant pathology major, specializing in plant microbiology, in the Department of Plant Pathology (PPTH). She was nominated by college faculty and staff who felt that she personified the award’s attributes of academic, disciplinary, and professional excellence.

The Cuyahoga County resident completed an internship at a Holden Forests and Gardens branch campus, the David G. Leech Research Station in Madison, Ohio. The 30-acre station specializes in rhododendron and azalea breeding. “I helped maintain the visual appearance of display gardens through pruning, mulching, and mowing,” McQuain said. “I also pollinated and hybridized rhododendrons and azaleas to increase environmental hardiness and physical appearances.”

She credits her internship with solidifying why she chose her major. “It helped me realize that I really enjoyed working in plant pathology and horticulture,” she said. “I was able to work outdoors doing horticultural work, while gaining experience in a lab doing research with plant pathogens.”

Research is something that McQuain really enjoys and she has worked part-time in the soybean pathology lab since 2022. Her responsibilities include assisting in collecting Ohio field soil samples and screening profiling of soybean cyst nematodes, preparation and maintenance of greenhouse and laboratory experiments, phenotype screenings of Ohio soybean seedlings with oomycete races, molecular characterization of Ohio oomycete isolates, and diagnostic work with Ohio soybean samples.

According to her nominator, PPTH associate professor Monica Lewandowski, “Keely is very interested in plant disease diagnostics, which requires advanced knowledge and keen problem-solving skills. She has been an undergraduate researcher with assistant professor Horacio Lopez-Nicora and developed broad expertise with many soybean diseases, including soybean cyst nematode and water molds. Her research with distinction project centered on diagnostic methods for water molds, the cause of major diseases of soybean and other crops.”

McQuain said that she learned “how to identify multiple soybean diseases, as well as test for resistance to Phytophthora in soybeans, process and count nematode eggs for field estimates, and how to make media and maintain culture collections of oomycete isolates.”

McQuain’s extracurriculars included involvement as a Dunn Sports and Wellness Scholar. “Through this honorary, I was provided with opportunities to develop my leadership style. I also mentored a group of freshmen in the scholars program.” She also participated in the OSU Buckeyethon raising awareness and funds for children with cancer.

After graduation, McQuain plans to attend graduate school at Ohio State for a master’s in plant pathology and work in the soybean pathology lab assisting Horacio Lopez-Nicora.

A reception for the Distinguished Senior Award recipients and their families was held on Thursday, April 4, hosted by Ann Christy and Cathann A. Kress, Ohio State vice president for agricultural administration and CFAES dean. Meet the 23 outstanding students and learn more about each via a YouTube video release at go.osu.edu/CFAES2024DSA.

“Honoring the award recipients for their excellence will be a highlight for us this spring. These students have excelled and most certainly will continue to thrive in their future careers,” said Christy.

In autumn 2023, there were 2,224 undergraduate students in CFAES pursuing Bachelor of Science degrees in 21 majors. Learn more about CFAES academic programs at go.osu.edu/B4V2.



Keely W. McQuain

NORTH ROYALTON, OH

Plant Pathology - Plant Microbiology

Department of Plant Pathology

Photo available by sending a request to flood.13@osu.edu

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