

PIZZA WITH PROFESSORS FEEDS HUNGRY MINDS

By Eryn Cooper

TUSCALOOSA, AL (BAMA) – A room full of college students and free pizza. Sounds like a match made in heaven, right?

Well, that was certainly the plan for UA professor Dr. Kimberly Bissell, who attracted hungry minds to the annual “Pizza with Professors” luncheon—where undergrads chat with faculty about research opportunities in their field.

“I think the free food is definitely a selling point, but the other part is at the University of Alabama we’re getting an increasingly large number of students who know they want to go into graduate or professional school, go to medical school, they know they’ve got to get involved in research,” Dr. Bissell said.

But this event isn’t just meant for those who know what or even if they want to research. Dr. Diana Dolliver encourages students to explore options they might not have considered yet.

“As an undergraduate, this is the perfect time for students to experiment with different fields,” Dr. Bissell explained.

Sean Drummond, a biology student at UA, also sees merit in students investigating other disciplines.

“It’s such a good experience for these students to see there’s areas outside just their own bubble of classes they could be researching. Events like these, they get advertised, it’s so awesome to see this because this is the most students we’ve seen in the last couple of years,” Drummond said.

So What made the turnout especially remarkable this year? Communications Studies Specialist Dr. Darrin Griffin has the answer.

“I think that people generally hold a stereotype that science is out of their realm of understanding, that science is difficult, it’s not fun, and I think that creating an informal environment where you can just have lunch with scientists and professors and you can talk to them anything you want, creates opportunities to make connections with professors, and see that they’re personable, they have charisma,” said Dr. Griffin.

While some students might find having lunch with your professors could be a little “cheesy,” These professors emphasize that exploring opportunities in undergraduate research could lead to experiences you can’t get anywhere else.

“You get the chance to not only work with a professor for the whole semester but you actually get to synthesize it on your own and present your findings just like we do at our national conferences. So getting the opportunities to build your skills in oral and written communication especially in front of an audience may seem daunting, but you get experience with it and the better you can build those skills now, the better you’ll have success after college,” Dr. Dolliver added.

Looks like a world of opportunities awaits these students “crust” around the corner.