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Converse University Receives \$592K Grant from National Science Foundation

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (March 8, 2023) – Converse University received a \$592,000 award from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to expand upon its existing STEM outreach program, Science, Technology, Arts, and Research Scholars (STARS). The grant was secured by Dr. Neval Ertürk, Associate Provost of Research and Engagement and Professor of Biology.

This funding will support Converse's new Research Experiences for Teachers Sites in Biological Sciences (BIORETS) program, spearheaded by lead investigator, Dr. Ertürk, and supported by faculty members Dr. Mark Bohler, Dr. Ed Griffin, Dr. Rich Keen and Dr. Chris Varnon.

Dr. Ertürk, an active participant in research initiatives in South Carolina and a consistent advocate for research at Converse, said she believes the BIORETS program will help South Carolina teachers develop a hands-on curriculum for a more diverse population of students who wish to pursue careers in STEM disciplines.

“Converse is committed to continuing to bolster STEM disciplines on our campus,” Dr. Ertürk said. “We will drive our city and region vibrantly forward by working with middle and high school teachers to ensure STEM education in our state is a success.” She attributed the grant’s success to a strong team effort at the university. “Converse's team of faculty from the science, math, and education departments worked diligently together to make this grant a reality.”

The NSF grant allows Converse’s BIORETS program to train 24 teachers for six weeks during the summer and ten weeks during the academic year. BIORETS will allow middle and high school teachers to gain valuable hands-on laboratory experiences working side-by-side with Converse faculty. Teachers accepted into Converse's BIORETS program will participate in professional development workshops and have the opportunity to mentor high school students who conduct research on campus. Participants will engage in authentic research experiences in cellular and molecular biology and biomathematics research with a focus on neuroscience.

Teachers will also receive support in developing lesson plans and hands-on activities to engage students in neurobiology concepts and improve their students' readiness for STEM careers.

Participating educators will attend orientation workshops, pedagogical seminars, laboratory meetings, professional development workshops, lessons on curriculum development, oral and poster presentations, and academic year classroom visits.

The BIORETS program aims to engage middle and high school teachers in authentic research experiences to help them close the gap in learning caused by the pandemic. Teachers will receive support in developing lesson plans and hands-on activities to engage their students in neurobiology concepts and improve their students' readiness for STEM careers. Priority will be given to teachers who work in underresourced schools.

Middle and high school teachers serving in Upstate South Carolina are invited to apply to the program through the NSF [Education and Training application](#). Teachers who successfully complete the program will receive a summer salary and funding to purchase classroom resources. For more information, visit www.converse.edu/BIORETS or email Dr. Neval Erturk (neval.erturk@converse.edu).

About NSF

The U.S. National Science Foundation is an independent federal agency that supports science and engineering in all 50 states and U.S. territories. Established in 1950 by Congress, they fulfill their mission chiefly by making grants. Their investments account for about 25% of federal support to America's colleges and universities for basic research: research driven by curiosity and discovery. The NSF also supports solutions-oriented research with the potential to produce advancements for the American people.

About Converse University

Converse University empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. The University encompasses the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Business; the School of the Arts; the School of Education and Graduate Studies; and the Converse College for Women. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers.

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