

Seminar and TRB Conference Attendance: Year 4

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16.Abstract Students from the three campuses of The University of Alabama of System are engaged in a variety of transportation related research activities. This project provided a forum for transportation students to present their research results to faculty and students from their home campuses as well as transportation professionals in a professional setting. Faculty representatives from the three campuses selected six students to make presentations. These students were rewarded with travel money to cover the cost of attending the Transportation Research Board’s Annual Meeting in Washington DC.			
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Executive Summary

There were two issues examined in this project. First, students from the three University of Alabama campuses need the opportunity to present the results of their research in a professional forum. Second, students need the opportunity to attend international meetings to learn first-hand research work being conducted at other universities. This project addressed these issues by identifying deserving students, providing a forum to highlight their research work, and providing a means to explore other research work being performed nationwide through attendance at the Transportation Research Board's Annual Meeting.

Section 1

Introduction

The issues examined in this project were twofold. First, there is a variety of quality transportation research currently being performed by undergraduate and graduate students from the three campuses in The University of Alabama System. Unfortunately, prior to this project's initiation in 2000, no mechanism existed for students to present the results of their research to the other faculty members from either their home campus or the other campuses. The solution developed in this project was the development of a transportation student seminar hosted in conjunction with the UTCA Annual Symposium in Tuscaloosa. Students from the three campuses were required to submit an original abstract to a faculty member at any of the three schools. The faculty members from the three schools then formed a review board and selected those students who were invited to present posters as part of the symposium.

The second issue addressed in this project was the lack of funding to send our best students to the Transportation Research Board's Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. This meeting is one of the premiere transportation conferences in the world, attracting participants from around the globe. Attendance at this meeting enabled our students to experience, firsthand, the research topics being studied and the solutions to those topics. Attendance at this meeting represented an incredible opportunity for students from The University of Alabama System to learn about the future of transportation and how their research will help realize the future.

This project combined these two issues by awarding travel funds to students to attend the Transportation Research Board's Annual Meeting as a reward for being selected to present in the student seminar. This report is divided into four chapters. **Section 1** presents the basis of the project. **Section 2** discusses the selection and review process used to select the students invited to present as well as a review of the student seminar. **Section 3** presents the impact from the students attending the TRB Annual Meeting. The final section of this report provides an overview of the results and expectations for future projects.

Section 2 Student Selection and Presentations

The initial task for this project focused on advertising, selecting the students to present, and hosting the presentations in an appropriate forum. The advertising was accomplished through an announcement requesting students to submit an abstract of their potential research work for consideration of presentation at the student seminar. The announcement for UAB is shown in **FIGURE 2-1**. Copies of the announcement were distributed to each of the campus representatives for the project and they were responsible for placing these in locations the students would see them and generate interest.

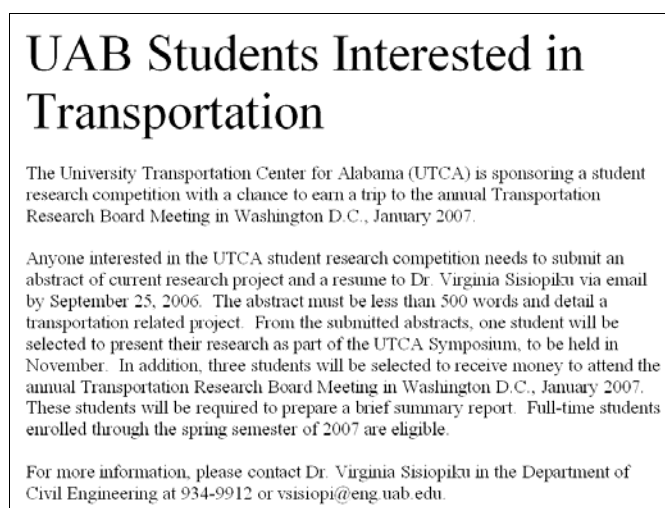


FIGURE 2-1 Announcement for UAB students.

Each announcement requested that the appropriate on-campus representative collect abstracts. The two on-campus representatives who were not on the student's home campus performed the reviews of the abstracts. This was performed to remove some bias from the reviews. Individual faculty who worked closely with students on projects were not allowed to judge those students. In addition, the abstracts were made available to external members of the UTCA Advisory Board for review. The reviews from the representatives were then forwarded to Dr. Anderson, summaries were developed, and letters of acceptance to present a poster at the conference were sent to the students.

The poster session where the student presentations were held was included as a portion of the University Transportation Center for Alabama Research Symposium and Transportation Career Fair on November 13, 2006 in the Ferguson Center of The University of Alabama. Overall, nine

students, representing the three campuses, submitted abstracts for the program and were invited to present posters (one from UA, four from UAB, and four from UAH). Based on the travel funds and nationality restrictions, six students were awarded travel funds to attend the TRB's Annual Meeting from the symposium (one from UA, three from UAB, and two from UAH). Pictures from the Symposium can be found in Appendix A.

Section 3

TRB Attendance

The final task conducted in this project was to provide travel money to attend the Transportation Research Board's Annual Meeting in January 2007 for the students who were selected. Before attending the TRB's Annual Meeting, each student was responsible for preparing an itinerary of sessions and/or committee meetings they planned to attend and discuss these with their on-campus representative. Some of the session topics that were identified by the students included:

- Asset Management
- Pavement Management Systems
- Statewide Transportation Planning
- Transportation Safety
- Traffic Simulation
- Intelligent Transportation Systems
- Pavement Testing
- Aviation

In addition, each student attending the TRB's Annual Meeting was required to prepare a written summary of the sessions attended and note the relationship between conference sessions and his or her current research or interest in transportation. Quotes from the student summaries included:

- “I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend the conference. As I ponder a possible career in transportation engineering this was a great introduction into the type of work I would be performing. Much curiosity was stirred in me as I began to think about a possible thesis topic during the conference. I saw my interest in certain aspects of transportation grow during this experience. Mainly, transportation planning, freight modeling, and some traffic studies sparked my curiosity.”
- “I really enjoyed the opportunity to attend the Transportation Research Board's Annual Conference. I was amazed while looking at the conference guide because there are so many different research topics available in one single field. After attending the conference, I noticed that most of my interests lie in safety, driving tendencies, and free flow traffic volume. I am also fascinated by the traffic volume and construction of airports and the planning required for such large scale projects. The safety and planning tips will help me finish my industrial engineering degree, but more importantly, I have learned about the wealth of possibility I can pursue in graduate school. I can now see myself pursuing a career in transportation.”

- “My capstone project is on freight model validation and my proposed dissertation subject is creation of time of day factors for rural roadways. Freight forecasting and modeling are key to both of these projects. Going to the TRB meeting allowed me to network with professionals in the freight and logistics business, researchers from other schools and research centers, and other graduate students from across the country. I feel that the contacts I was able to make during the meeting and the information that was presented will help me do a better job of addressing all the relevant factors as I finish my Master’s degree and begin the doctoral process.”
- “Overall, my first experience at the TRB meeting was a great one. At this time, I am already arranging to submit two or three papers for review for the 2008 meeting.”

Overall, the students took advantage of the opportunity to learn from top researchers and identify how those research ideas can be incorporated into their work.

Section 4 Conclusions

This project worked toward the development of a community of students from the three campuses, highlighting the research students from the three campuses are conducting, and providing a means to explore other research work being performed nationwide.

The relevance of this project was far-reaching. The project allowed students from the three campuses to compete against each other and present their research results in a professional forum attended by transportation professionals from across the state. In addition, this project allowed students to learn first-hand what research topics were being examined internationally through attendance at the TRB's Annual Meeting. The students' experiences and education gained through this project are anticipated to become evident in the completion of graduate level work being performed at the three campuses.

Appendix A
Images from the UTCA Seminar



FIGURE A-1 UAB faculty with students.



FIGURE A-2 Student presenter.



FIGURE A-3 Faculty and students.