The Southern Weed Science Society Weed Contest was held on August 1, 2012 in Fayetteville, AR. This event is an educational experience for undergraduate and graduate students in Southern Universities to broaden their applied skills in Weed Science. The contest consists of 5 parts which are weed identification, applicator calibration, herbicide identification by the response of various crops and weeds, diagnostics and farmer problem solving, and finally a mystery event. The participants for both graduate and undergraduate are evaluated as individuals. Moreover, graduate students are also evaluated as a team of either 3 or 4 members from their respective school.

The UT graduate team consisted of Kelly Barnett, Matthew Wiggins who are Ph.D candidates in Dr. Steckel’s program and Britt Gaban who is a MS candidate in Dr. Mueller’s program. Out of the 40 graduate students who participated in the contest Kelly Barnett was the first place individual! This is a great feat as she was up against some very talented competition which included her UT colleagues.

There were 9 graduate teams in the contest. Virginia Tech took first place honors followed very closely by a team from Mississippi State who took second and our team from UT who earned 3rd place honors. The final score of the top 4 teams in this contest was razor close. Had the UT team missed just one more point they would have fallen to 4th (behind UGA) and had they made just one more point would have vaulted to 1st.

These graduate students need to be commended for all the hard work and study they put into preparing for this contest. This was mostly self-directed by these students. Moreover, they also helped coach the UT Martin undergraduate students as well over the course of the summer. The folks that helped coach these graduate students include Dr. Tom Mueller, Dr. Chris Main, Dr. Eric Walker of UT Martin, Dr. Greg Stapleton of BASF and Dr. Steckel.

Dr. Eric Walker from UT Martin took a group 10 undergraduate students to this contest. Of these 10 UT Martin students 5 work at WTREC this year and one worked at WTREC last year. They were Shawn Butler and Adam Rushing in Dr. Steckel’s program, Catherine Clement and Lauren Bennett in Dr. Main’s program, and Austin Scott in Dr. Angela McClure’s program. In addition, Whiney Crowe who worked for Dr. Stewart last year and is an intern for Extension Agent Phillip Shelby this year participated. Out of the 11 undergraduates who participated Shawn Butler was the first place individual. All of these undergrads who participated should be commended for the work and study they put into preparing for this contest. Also Dr. Walker did yeoman work in generating interest and coaching the undergraduate team.

Besides the educational aspect of this competition this is a great venue for students to network with industry and academia from all over the Southern States. Even more important it allows them to establish relationships with their peers, a number of which will likely be their colleagues for the next 3 or 4 decades. Finally I want to mention how well both the graduate and undergraduate students represented us. I heard many compliments about their performance both in the events and after the contest. They were very professional while able to demonstrate they knew how to have a good time. This was very well shown in the mystery event which turned out to be a foot race across a very flooded rice field. Unlike many of their colleagues I am happy to report that none of our UT students face planted!