



PROFILES OF STEM RESEARCHERS AT VT

ADAM COATES, PH.D.

Assistant Professor, Forest Fire Ecology and Management

Research Focus

- History, management, and ecology of wildland fires, which includes both wildfires and prescribed fires

Advice:

Get to know your professors. They can help you connect with research, internships, and employment opportunities. Try things outside of your comfort zone because you never know what you might discover.

Fun Fact:

I love going to Disney Parks with my wife and kids. In fact, I proposed to my wife inside Cinderella's Castle.



Image taken prior to the pandemic

HEAVEN AZIZ, '21

Environmental Resources Management major; Forestry and Watershed Management minors

Research Experience

- Sr: Feedstock availability, logistics, and costs to supply a Biochar facility in the Mid-Atlantic region
- Jr: Analysis of leaf wax content on Mountain Laurel in an Appalachian woodland

Advice:

We are so much more than any grade. It's great to have goals, but it's even better to have perspective on what is really important in life at the end of the day.

Fun Fact

Two of my favorite things are riding horses and reading books.



Image taken prior to the pandemic



Overcoming Challenges

Dr. Coates:

I had severe asthma and allergies as a child. Those conditions impacted my ability to participate in many outdoor activities, which also affected my weight and self-confidence. As a result, I often found it difficult to believe in myself and trust others. As I grew older, those medical conditions affected me less and I was able to spend more time outdoors. I developed a passion for natural resources.

Aziz:

I've always put a lot of my self-worth on academics, so when I came to college I got a big wake up call that propelled my growth. I honestly felt too dumb to be here and didn't have a healthy relationship with grades and school. I did a lot of reflecting and realized that we are so much more than any grade. It's great to have goals, but it's even better to have perspective on what is really important in life. Realizing that I am in control of my life choices and changing my mindset about what college was to me allowed me to find a major, a friend group, and a relationship with school that I truly love. I think freshman year me would be happy with where I am now.

My Journey

Aziz:

I was extremely fortunate to have built close relationships with a few of my professors during my sophomore year. Those relationships put me in a position to be selected for the Next Generation Scholarship Program that focuses on providing financial support to first-generation, underrepresented students as well as an undergraduate research opportunity. Becoming a recipient of this program was a huge confidence boost for me and opened up so many opportunities I never thought I would have. I had no idea how much I would enjoy participating in undergraduate research or how much more capable I would feel when I think about leaving college and starting a career after this experience.

Diversity Work

Dr. Coates:

I am part of diversity committees with the Association for Fire Ecology and the International Association of Wildland Fire. I'm also in the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation (FREC) Inclusive Excellence team and have been able to work with other FREC faculty to secure USDA grants that provide scholarships and research experiences for minority and underrepresented students. One of my graduate students recently interviewed 21 African-American landowners in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia as part of her thesis research. We learned some valuable information that will assist minority landowners throughout the Southeast. She now works for a nonprofit in Washington, DC, and is active in continuing the promotion of minority land ownership and education. Overseeing her research that fuels her current work are highlights in my young career.