I attended the 2022 AhR Symposium: Toxicity to Therapeutics at State College, Pennsylvania from June 20-23, 2022. The conference was centered around the aryl hydrocarbon receptor (AhR), a highly promiscuous receptor implicated in numerous diseases and pathways that can be used as an environmental xenobiotic sensor. Since I use AhR activity as a key measure of bioactivity in microplastics research, I was excited to attend this conference to learn about novel downstream effects and ligands of the AhR to better contextualize the impact of my research on human health. Each day of the conference had multiple non-overlapping topics and poster sessions. I was able to attend all sessions and talk with many of the other attendees. Talks I found to be among the most interesting were by Dr. Ellen van den Bogaard from Radboud University Medical Center in the Netherlands on the role of AhR signaling in cross talk between the skin and its associated microbiome, and Dr. Mark Hahn from Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts on the role of AhR signaling in environmental adaptation.

My abstract was accepted by the organizing committee, so I had the opportunity to present a poster titled “Mammalian Toxicity of Plastic Particles” (shown above). I shared some of my work characterizing the bioactivity of environmental microplastics and of laboratory-produced environmental plastic particle mimetics. I discussed my work with a handful of people, and I will use their insightful thoughts on my poster to strengthen my experiments and scientific communication skills.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was my first in-person conference. Despite being slightly nervous about this new experience, the small size, ample formal and informal discussion times, and the obvious camaraderie between many of the professors made this conference a great experience for me. I am excited to apply what I learned about being a productive conference attendee to future scientific meetings.