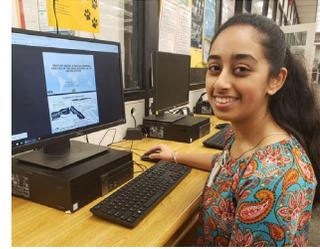


Local student earns national attention for work tracking drug epidemic

Navya Tripathi is tracking another crisis.

Back in 2017, she won a national award for her work mapping the impact of Hurricane Irma, including storm surges, flooding, evacuation responses and shelter use. But for the past several months, she's been tracking the nation's drug crisis, with that work gaining national attention.



Tripathi, a sophomore at Buchholz High School, was the only high school student in the country whose work was selected for a full presentation at the 2019 URISA GIS-Pro Conference in New Orleans last fall. URISA is a professional organization for experts in the field of GIS (Geographic Information System), which is defined as a 'computer-based tool that analyzes, stores, manipulates and visualizes geographic information, usually in a map.' The field has many practical applications—mapping epidemics, for example, or city planning—which can in turn drive decision-making by government and other public and private entities.

Through this particular project, Tripathi is highlighting those places and people most affected by America's drug crisis.

"There are so many agencies that are trying to address it, which got me thinking that if they could focus their resources on the right groups and the right areas, it would help," said Tripathi. "I was shocked by the number and range of people affected. I knew it was a big problem, I just didn't know how big."

Tripathi said she was nervous about presenting her work to a conference of national experts but that they treated her with respect and provided valuable input on additional avenues she could pursue with her research—for example, studying the severity of the drug epidemic in locations with easy access to pharmacies or prevention agencies.

Tripathi says GIS mapping is both science and art and that it has the power to influence people's perceptions of important issues.

"It's a great way to present people with the whole picture," she said. "If someone's just telling you what's going on, you might not understand the gravity of the situation, but if you can easily see differences over time or between regions, you get a much better sense of what's really happening."

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