

Conference promotes undergrad research

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Layout Editor

What constitutes the perfect spring break? Sun, fun, beaches, presenting research at a national conference. What? Presenting research at a national conference! This proved to be just the case for six students and two professors representing Meredith at the fifteenth annual National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) Mar. 15-17 at the University of Kentucky (UK) in Lexington, Ky.

According to Dr. Rhonda Zingraff, professor of sociology, who went with the students to the NCUR, the students were basically "self-selected."

She explained that they had already been working on papers and presentations, and their professors encouraged them to submit abstracts of their projects for consideration.

She said, "Our student presenters represented a nice variety of disciplines."

According to Zingraff, sophomores Monica Teigen and Meagan Chaney presented art projects, senior Sara Rashkin presented a project combining sociology and dance, senior Rachel Langley shared her findings on improving teaching methods for students with disabilities, senior Amy Fuson shared her research on body decorations (piercings,

tattoos, etc.) and senior Maggie Tucker shared her research on the democratization of Franco Spain.

"Our students performed so well in comparison with students from other colleges," stated Zingraff. "It was a proud moment for Meredith College."

Zingraff was especially pleased considering that, as far as she knows, this was the first time that Meredith students have presented at the NCUR.

Langley commented, "I found it interesting to see other presentations and learn about other disciplines." She added, "Sometimes it is really easy to become focused on the area of your major and to ignore other areas, so this was a great experience."

Teigen agreed with Langley that seeing presentations from a wide array of disciplines was interesting. She especially enjoyed the presentations concerning her disciplines of studio art and art history.

She explained, "In the future I would prefer to go to a conference with a focus on my area."

Teigen's presentation entitled Dale Eldred's Light and Time Tower was based on the Topics in Modern Art Essay, which she had completed for one of her art classes. She explained that the project combined color theory, biology and

art history.

According to Maggie Tucker, who is majoring in history, one of the most valuable benefits she gained from the experience was simply the opportunity to present.

"I am thinking about becoming a teacher, so this provided me an opportunity to practice presenting and teaching a subject I care about," she explained.

Tucker explained that preparing a 13-minute presentation from her 45-page senior thesis proved a challenging task. She said, "I cut it down and then I took it to my thesis adviser Dr. [Michael] Novak, and he made more cuts. Next, I read it and made additional cuts to condense it into a 13-minute presentation."

Tucker explained that there are so many presentations listed, so "if you want people to come to yours, it helps to have a catchy title."

Tucker, a 23+ student, said that she did not really see any other 23+ student presenters, but she "wasn't really looking either." She added, "I'm sure there were some among the more than 2000 presenters."

Tucker was able to attend most of the Meredith presentations, and, like Zingraff, she was impressed: "The Meredith presentations were some of the best that I saw."

According to Teigen, there were a variety of plenary speakers at the conference including Wendell Berry, a Kentucky resident with many occupations including environmentalist, farmer and poet.

Teigen most enjoyed speaker Nikky Finney, a poet and professor in the English department of the University of Kentucky. "She is an awesome black Southern writer who reminded me of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison," she said. "She was so amazing that she left me in tears." she

added.

Langley explained that one night their group went to the Kentucky Horse Park, a complex where horses are bred and stabled. This complex housed some Kentucky Derby winners, she added. There they enjoyed dinner and some square dancing.

She added that the conference had planned activities as well. "They offered tours of sights in Kentucky such as the Louisville Slugger bat factory, a brewery and a chocolate factory."

Langley added that there

were also informational sessions on graduate school for any interested students.

Zingraff stated that she hopes that in the future a wider range of faculty will anticipate the conference and encourage students to submit their work so that a wider range of disciplines will be covered.

Overall, students and professors considered the conference a success.

Zingraff stated, "Bravo to these women who spent part of their spring break at this conference and to how well they represented Meredith."



Senior Sara Rashkin presents at the Undergraduate Research Conference in Louisville, Ky., during Spring Break.

PHOTO BY RHONDA ZINGRAFF



Meagan Cheney, Amy Fuson, Rachel Langley and Sara Rashkin enjoy their time in Kentucky.

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