

Undergrad Scholars from Across Country Convene at UCSD to Present Research on Wide-Ranging Topics

Presentations ranged from the psychological impact of skin color on racial minority identity to new perspectives on calculating 'Big Bang' nuclear reactions

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More than 120 undergraduates from the University of California San Diego and other campuses from across the region and country gathered at UCSD in mid-August to present findings on a wide range of research studies at the 2006 UCSD Summer Research Conference (SRC). The students' work was conducted this summer under the guidance of faculty mentors from UCSD, San Diego State University, and the University of San Diego.

Sponsored by UCSD's office of Academic Enrichment Programs (AEP), the annual conference allows undergraduates to share the results of investigations in a cross-section of academic disciplines - from physics and public health to arts and humanities - with their peers, faculty members, and other interested audience members.

This year's presentations covered such topics as how Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath affected anxiety levels among surviving children; the uncertainties in calculating "Big Bang" nuclear reaction rates in the universe; the influence of skin color on racial identity among African Americans and Mexican Americans; further perspectives on the human body's resistance to antibiotics; how the eye talks to the brain; and the role of U.S. foreign policy in the destabilization of the Haitian government.

"Gatherings like the Summer Research Conference represent a growing trend among higher education institutions to offer undergraduates opportunities to participate in significant research projects outside the classroom," says David Artis, Ph.D., director of AEP, a unit of UCSD Student Affairs under Vice Chancellor Joseph Watson.

These hands-on experiences, he says, "help prepare students for graduate school, and enhance their critical thinking skills. At the end of the assistantship," Artis adds, "many students consider the experience of working closely with a faculty member on a particular project to be the highlight of their undergraduate educational experience."

Additionally, Artis says, "the Summer Research Conference recognizes participating students' scholarly works, and gives them a chance to gain experience in any scholar's essential duties of presenting, clarifying and defending work before peers and other professionals in a public forum."

Adds Veronica Henson-Phillips, coordinator of AEP's Faculty Mentor Program and coordinator of this year's conference: "Feedback from the participating students has been extremely positive....We are extremely proud of the research achievements of these undergraduates this summer, and of their commitment of time and effort with their mentors to gain important insight into what it takes to be a successful scholar. We also sincerely thank the faculty who served as mentors, giving the students such a rewarding experience."

Besides UCSD, participating students hailed from such colleges and universities as San Diego State University, San Diego University, Stanford University, UC Irvine, Florida International University, Grambling State University, Brown University, University of Texas at Austin, California State University at San Marcos, San Diego Mesa College, UCLA, Carnegie Mellon University, New Mexico State University, University of Puerto Rico, UC Berkeley, the College of Wooster (Ohio), Northeastern University, and Arizona State University.

"From their background and the level of excellence displayed in their work, we believe Summer Research Conference undergraduates will be leaders in the next generation of scientists, scholars, professional and government leaders, and university faculty," says Artis.

The annual gathering also serves to encourage more ethnically underrepresented and low-income student participants at UCSD and other institutions to actively pursue doctoral degrees and careers in research and college teaching, says Henson-Phillips.

"Many of these students are already contemplating attending Ph.D. programs, medical school, or other professional schools following graduation," says Artis.

The Summer Research Conference is supported and funded by a host of local, state and national initiatives sponsored at UCSD and elsewhere. These include: the UC Office of the President; UC/Fund/Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs; the U.S. Department of Education; the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health; California Alliance for Minority Participation in the Sciences, Engineering and Math (CAMP); Ronald E. McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program, Faculty Mentor Program; California Telecommunications and Information Technology (Cal(IT)2); UC Leadership Excellence Through Advanced Degrees (UC Leads), and UCSD Excellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach, Research on Health Disparities and Training (UCSD Export).

With similar aims as the summer conference, AEP also sponsors an Undergraduate Research Conference each spring specifically for UCSD undergraduates.

For further information on these and other AEP programs designed to prepare undergraduates for graduate school and professional school, visit: <http://aep.ucsd.edu/default2.htm>.

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