

UC San Diego Holds 23rd Annual Undergraduate Research Conference

Academic Enrichment Program hosts campus-wide celebration of undergraduate research

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Nanotechnology, immigration and migration, surgery and medicine, electrical engineering and the visual arts is just a sampling of the diverse topics that students are researching at the University of California, San Diego. UC San Diego is a leader in providing undergraduate students with valuable, hands-on research opportunities outside the classroom in virtually every academic discipline. On April 24, more than 150 undergraduate students presented their original research at the annual UCSD Undergraduate Research Conference.

Now in its 23rd year, the Undergraduate Research Conference recognizes outstanding student research projects and provides an opportunity for students to discuss their research with faculty as well as with one another. Ranked seventh best public university in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*, UC San Diego is an internationally renowned research institution, and is well-known for its undergraduate research opportunities where students can work one-on-one with internationally distinguished faculty, participate in cutting-edge projects and make important contributions to their field of interest.

The purpose of this conference is to underscore the importance of research experience in undergraduate education, and to inspire more students to pursue post-graduate degrees and careers in research. The event is a unique occasion for undergraduates to present their research findings before faculty and network with fellow student researchers. The students presenting papers were all nominated by UCSD faculty who judged their work to be outstanding.

"Faculty nominations have increased by nearly 50 percent in the last 10 years, reflecting, I believe, greater support not only for undergraduate research, but for the importance of an early scholarly presentation experience for our students," said David Artis, dean of undergraduate research initiatives at UC San Diego. "We were impressed by the range of projects and the depth of our students' investigations."

For Jonathan Okerblom, a fifth-year transfer student studying physiology and neuroscience, presenting at the conference was a chance to receive feedback and advice from knowledgeable faculty members. "It was an intimate setting," he said. "I presented my paper in front of two faculty and five or six students-and it was not a competition. The faculty was there just to help you."

Okerblom presented his paper on the protein Hsp70, the focus of his research under Antonio De Maio, Ph.D., in the department of surgery. Since transferring to UC San Diego, Okerblom has discovered a passion for research--specifically proteomics, or protein research--through his various experiences working alongside faculty. Now he hopes to continue his research in graduate school. "Proteomics has a wide range of practical applications, and can lead to important discoveries about critical illnesses such as cancer, HIV and Alzheimer's," added Okerblom. "It's a fascinating topic that I hope to continue studying in graduate school."

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