

Posters on the Hill Report

Posters on the Hill, CUR's signature public outreach event, recently celebrated its 15th edition. The event was originally developed as a venue for undergraduate students to present their original research to members of Congress and representatives of federal funding agencies. At its core, *Posters* still seeks to achieve two goals. The first is to highlight the accomplishments of undergraduate students engaged in research, one of the best educational experiences available, and to give them the opportunity to describe in their own voices the benefits they derive from having participated in original research projects. Second, because research is expensive—both in terms of the considerable costs of supplies and equipment in many disciplines and in terms of the time faculty commit to mentoring—student presentations allow members of Congress and staff of funding agencies to learn about the sophistication and quality of research that undergraduates perform. Addressing these two goals offers the opportunity to build support for federal programs that fund and promote undergraduate research.

In its original format, 60 groups of students representing all divisions within CUR were selected from across the country. Students began with a dinner meeting the night before the event to receive instruction on how to meet with their Representatives and Senators. The following day students would visit Congressional and Senatorial offices and then participate in an end-of-the-day poster session visited by Congressional staff, funding agency staff, and, of course, members of Congress. In recent years, the poster event has grown significantly; it features the same core ideas and activities but stretches over a two-day period. Over the past five years, applications have grown from 200 to 300 annually to around 700 this year. There is a strong effort to ensure disciplinary, geographic, and institutional diversity in the posters selected.

On the day before the event, students who arrive early can go on CUR-arranged tours. For example, this year students could take behind-the-scenes tours of the Folger Shakespeare Library, National Archives, Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute at the National Zoo, and the National Institutes of Health.

Students then traveled to the American Chemical Society's national headquarters for dinner with their advisors. During the dinner students heard presentations from Nancy Hensel, CUR's Executive Officer, and

Della Cronin, Vice President of Washington Partners LLC, CUR's advocacy firm. These presenters discussed the following day's schedule and provided instruction on how to interact with members of Congress and their staffs. This included a video written and performed by a former Congressman on the proper way to present their ideas. After a question- and-answer session, each student received a certificate for participating.

On the morning of the event, students gather for a continental breakfast in the Rayburn House Office Building and hear a kickoff presentation. Legislative aides and nationally known scientists have presented to students, as well as Congressman Rush Holt (NJ-5) and former Congressman Vernon Ehlers (WI-3). This year, Kevin James, legislative assistant to Congressman Tom Petri (WI-6), and Josh Franco, senior legislative assistant to Congressman John Garamendi (CA-10) discussed how they obtained their positions and fielded questions about Congress. Representative Petri heads the Congressional Humanities Caucus, and Franco was responsible for having undergraduate research included in his college's first constitution. After breakfast, students traveled around Capitol Hill to meet with legislators in their offices.

For the first time ever, this year at noon presenters in the Arts and Humanities division set up their posters and met with guests in the Rayburn House Office Building. During this session a light lunch was provided to participants and guests, who included Congressional aides and representatives of arts and humanities organizations. At this session, four students were asked to give talks about their research methodologies and the impact their research had had on their lives.

In late afternoon students representing the biology, chemistry, geosciences, health sciences, mathematics and computer science, physics and astronomy, psychology, social sciences divisions of CUR put up their posters and visited other students' posters. At 5:30, in the Rayburn House Office Building, the evening session, including a reception sponsored by CUR and the American Chemical Society, officially opened so that members of Congress, their aides, and representatives of federal funding agencies could see the posters and visit with students and other guests. About midway through the poster session, CUR presented its honorary CUR Fellows Award and the American Chemical Society presented its annual Public Service Awards.