Midbrains: Five Successful Years of Regional Undergraduate Neuroscience Conferences in the Upper Midwest

Eric Wiertelak, Clark Ohnesorge, Macalester College
Shelly Dickinson, Gary Muir, Kevin Crisp, Jeremy Loebach, Bonnie Sherman, St. Olaf College
Barbara Curchack, Inver Hills Community College
J. Roxanne Prichard, University of St. Thomas
Lawrence Wichlinski, Julie Neiworth, Carleton College
crisp@stolaf.edu

Since 2007, the Midbrains Undergraduate Neuroscience Conference (http://www.macalester.edu/midbrainconference/) has provided a forum for undergraduate students to present their research findings, attend research lectures by invited speakers, and learn about opportunities for graduate studies in neuroscience. The MidBrains meeting regularly attracts about 50 student poster and paper presentations across all areas of the neurosciences; more than 110 people attend the conference annually from 15 universities, colleges, and other institutions. The conference’s unique financial model offsets nearly 100 percent of the expenses of hosting the meeting, using contributions from four graduate school neuroscience programs each year. In return, representatives from graduate programs, through formal presentations and informal interactions, have the opportunity to tell undergraduates attending the conference about their particular graduate programs. As a result, participating graduate schools have reported increased numbers of applications to their neuroscience programs from institutions whose students attend Midbrains.

Promoting Undergraduate Research Through Sessions at the Eastern Economics Association’s Annual Conference

Stephen B. DeLoach, Elon University; Steven A. Greenlaw, University of Mary Washington, deloach@elon.edu

For two decades, undergraduate sessions have been a part of the Eastern Economics Association’s annual professional conference. For the last decade, Elon University and the University of Mary Washington have shared responsibility for organizing these sessions. Two key features make these sessions successful.

First, the students are in charge. The two universities alternate having their students organize sessions, handle all communication with presenters, and deliver the program information to the conference’s executive director. Students also organize a reception during the conference for the roughly 100 students and faculty participating in the sessions. Unlike other conferences, students, not faculty, serve as session chairs and discussants.

Second, the sessions are sponsored by Issues in Political Economy, the undergraduate research journal published jointly by Elon and Mary Washington. The journal’s website, www.elon.edu/ipe, serves as the source for all information regarding journal and conference submissions. Linking the sessions with the journal has helped us create strong brand recognition within our discipline.

Oral Presentation Skills at the Thompson Rivers University Undergraduate Conference

Ginny Ratsay, Elizabeth Rennie, Tom Waldichuk, Thompson Rivers University, twaldichuk@tru.ca

In keeping with the comprehensive nature of the university, the annual Thompson Rivers University (TRU) undergraduate conference is a forum for students from all disciplines, including voca-

tional programs, on the university’s various campuses. It also has grown to include students from other British Columbia universities. To prepare for the 2011 conference, students could develop conference presentation skills by attending workshops organized by the library. The workshops’ faculty mentors reflected the multi- and sometimes interdisciplinary nature of the conference. For example, a theatre professor focused on vocal skills, and a geography professor emphasized organization and possible categories for evaluation rubrics.

At the conference itself, the rubric had to be flexible enough to account for the different kinds of presentations made by students from different disciplines. However, it emphasized the presentation skills that transcend disciplinary boundaries—effective organization, visual aids, and communication of ideas. At the 2012 conference, we plan to further mentor students by providing customized written feedback.

Regional Disciplinary Undergraduate Group Connects with National Professional Organization

Louise Temple, James Madison University, templelm@jmu.edu

A unique organization involving five regional, primarily undergraduate institutions was begun six years ago under the sponsorship of the American Society for Microbiology (ASM). The Shenandoah Valley Student ASM Chapter remains the only group of its kind in the nation. An annual student research symposium is held in the spring at a centrally located campus. With funding from the Virginia branch of ASM, we sponsor a poster competition with small prizes, host a guest speaker, and provide lunch. The event attracts 20 to 30 students and 10 to 15 faculty members each year, giving the students a chance to present their work-in-progress at a small venue where the energy and interest in the poster presentations is palpable. Some of the work has subsequently been presented at state and general meetings of ASM.

Creating the Susquehanna Valley Undergraduate Research Symposium

Amy Wolaver, Carl Milofsky, Bucknell University
Heather Feldhaus, Bloomsburg University
awolaver@bucknell.edu

At the Susquehanna Valley Undergraduate Research Symposium in 2011, students from Bloomsburg and Bucknell Universities presented 21 summer research projects at a poster session attended by faculty from both universities and by researchers at the Geisinger Center for Health Research in Danville, Pennsylvania, where the event was held. Student research ranged from qualitative methods, including a community diversity study, to quantitative projects, including analysis of Pennsylvania inpatient admissions data. The students’ summer research projects included work in the disciplines of anthropology, biology, economics, geography, history, psychology, and sociology. Many of the projects were also service-learning projects for local and state agencies, which produced reports on such topics as diabetes-related hospitalizations, quality assessment of knee and hip replacement surgeries, a background piece for developing a “backpack” food program for grade-school children, and a study of community perceptions about diversity issues.