Summer research showcased at symposium

BY AMY VASILISHAN
CRUSADER NEWS STAFF

Hydrogen free radical chemistry, astrophysics, neuro-physiology, and molecular dynamics—these are just a few of the areas Holy Cross students worked in this past summer. Many of them took the opportunity to share their work in the eighth annual Undergraduate Summer Research Symposium last Friday. From atoms’ ionization states in astrophysics, to studies of blocking alcohol-associated anxiety with benzodiazepine receptors, students displayed the methods and results of their work and stood to answer the questions of passers-by. And, as spectators perused the two-day poster presentations displayed in Swords atrium, they found that the context and potential application of these students’ work appeared strongly to the impressiveness of such titles.

The event began with a few opening comments by the symposium director, physics Professor Timothy Roach. He expressed gratitude to his co-organizer, biology Professor Madeline Varagas, to the faculty for spending such time and energy with the students, and to the student researchers for continuing their work beyond the lab in taking the time to share all that they had accomplished.

“I am impressed with the wide distribution of projects,” remarked Roach indicating the representation of psychology, chemistry, physics, and biology with their many diverse sub-disciplines at the symposium. “It is also impressive to note the many institutions students have become involved in,” he said, pointing out that students took internships not only at Holy Cross, but also at other prestigious universities such as Harvard and Yale, and renowned companies such as Pfizer.

Heidi O’Donnell ’02, a chemistry major, was one such student with an impressive placement. She spent her summer studying the parameters of a drug dissolution device needed to justify data on a potentially marketable drug at Pfizer. Like most of the presenting students, O’Donnell took away more than just chemical data from her experience.

“The experience at Pfizer was more of a life experience than just what went on in the lab,” O’Donnell said. “It was living with other interns, learning about the business end of a large pharmaceutical company, and understanding the drug process as it went on in other divisions beyond where my work ended.”

O’Donnell’s positive experience with her laboratory work and its context was echoed by senior biology major and biological psychology concentration, Melissa Lin. Lin, participating in research at Holy Cross with psychology Professor Daniel Bitran, M.D., continued with work that she began during the year. Many students with similar strategy in mind made use of the summer months to increase their involvement in work that sparked their interest during the academic year. One student was able to get a head start on an anticipated research project for this semester. Even when the work presented was just an intermediary result in a larger project plan, the symposium allowed students to appreciate what had been accomplished thus far.

“I feel so excited that I’m able to present my work,” said Lin with a proud smile. “Seeing everything on display makes all the hard work seem worth it.”

Hard work clearly must have been a component of senior physics major Carolyn Berger’s research. Berger worked at Holy Cross, under the direction of Professor Roach, developed mathematical processes to determine the dominant ion of a particular element at temperatures common around black holes. As she explained her work to an interested student, Mr. Anthony Stankus of the science library interjected to comment on the level of her work.

“It says undergraduate on your name tag,” quipped Stankus, “but astrophysics? A graduate student could definitely take on this work.”

Indeed, the attendees of the Summer Research Symposium found themselves duly impressed with the caliber and scope of the work. Even Rev. Michael C. McFarland, S.J., took some time out before his scheduled appearance at the Smith Hall dedication to survey the students’ accomplishments. Most professors in the science disciplines did likewise, providing an opportunity for students to set up future research connections and receive their professors’ personal congratulations.

But more than that, the symposium was a showcase to the students’ hard work and applauded that of their colleagues. Student Stephanie Farrell, who was able to support his friends’ research, Chaz Strass ’02 found his time well worth it. “It’s amazing to see what all your friends are doing,” said Strass. “They spend their time on this incredible work that they don’t ever tell you about.”

Undoubtedly, at least 22 students should have a more interesting summer than the all-too-common shirt when people ask them what they did this summer.

New group forms to address federal drug policy

BY ADAM MUSSER
CRUSADER NEWS STAFF

Not for murder. Not for rape. Not for assault. But for possession, yes. A primary stipulation of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1998 demands that federal financial aid be denied to any person who has been convicted of either a state or federal drug offense. No such stipulation for other crimes exist. Moreover, under HEA, such financial aid is understood to encompass all types of possible aid, not disregarding federal grants, student loans, and the possibility for work-study.

Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP) is a new group at Holy Cross which is “committed to providing education on harms caused by the War on Drugs, working to involve youth in the political process, and promoting an open, honest, and rational discussion of alternative solutions to our nation’s drug problems” (Constitution of the Students for Sensible Drug Policy Chapter at the College of the Holy Cross). In its first year, the Holy Cross Chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (HC SSDP) hopes to bring students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni, and all others at Holy Cross to a more complete and comprehensive understanding of our nation’s drug policy and the adverse effects such a policy places on the poor and minorities in our country. Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), an organization that began at the Rochester Institute of Technology in 1998, now includes more than 156 university, college, and high school chapters in North America that are striving for a more thorough and absolute education of America’s population regarding the drug policy of the United States and, as a seemingly necessary result, the revocation of the drug provision of the Higher Education Act of 1998.

The Holy Cross Chapter of SSDP plans to focus on three primary campaigns during its inaugural year. The first and foremost aim of this organization concerns the aforementioned Drug-Free Student Aid Provision of the Higher Education Act of 1998. Secondly, HC SSDP intends to focus its efforts on the contemporary issue of criminal justice spending vs. education spending. And thirdly, an attempt will be made to discuss and debate the United States’ most recent implementation of the War on Drugs.

Frequently, SSDP members are immediately associated with legalization of marijuana. HC SSDP treasurer Evan Gilbert ’04, wishes to caution that “the SSDP does not support the idea of legalization, although that may be the view of some people.” While in some chapters this end may indeed be a goal, the HC SSDP in no way advocates legalization. However, the open discussion and debate of an alternative method to fighting the drug war may, in fact, lead to the recognition of legalization as a possible alleviating factor for many of her name against accusations for responsibility in the elevator accident. Watson is dragged into the conflict between two opposing ideological groups, the Empiricists and the Intuitionists; these two groups take opposing views on methods of elevator inspection, with the Empiricists relying upon definitive measurements and the Intuitionists relying upon their own gut feelings and the teachings of their founder, James Fulton. The investigation of the destroyed elevator, however, quickly spirals out of control into a much greater conflict, a race for the “black box”—the perfect elevator—with Lila Mae caught in the middle.

Drawing heavily from traditional detective novels and film noir, Whitehead not only invents a fascinating setting, but also creates a provocative story. The novel, however, does not simply serve as an inventive story, but rather provides ample material for satire and deep allegory.

The audience was eager to ask Whitehead questions about his works, presenting Whitehead an opportunity to explain his metaphors, writing style, and offer insights into his life as an author. Many questions focused on the meaning of the central symbols of the “black box” and the “second elevation”, Whitehead, however, did not answer these questions definitively, but rather left each reader to his or her own interpretation.

After the presentation, many students approached Whitehead to sign copies of their texts. Both students and faculty alike were enthused by the presentation.

Meghan Osborne, a student in the First-Year Program, commented that Whitehead “had a good sense of humor.” Darby Mee, another FYP-per, was impressed by the passage Whitehead read from his newer book, saying that it evoked powerful and vivid imagery of his home in North Carolina.

Dean G. Earl Peace, who serves not only as the dean of the freshman class but also as a professor in the First-Year Program, was very impressed by Whitehead’s presentation. He described Whitehead as “disarmingly frank” and “refreshingly candid.” Dean Peace, like many other audience members, appreciated Whitehead’s visit to the campus because it provided “the kind of revelations…you’d never find out without having the opportunity of hearing an author speak. It allows us to learn… about the author’s motive firsthand.” As an administrator, Dean Peace was excited to have such a prominent literary figure visit the campus. “It’s wonderful that we’re able to have an author come to campus to share his insights… It’s a rare opportunity.”

In order to bring FYP students and faculty together to discuss the theme of the program as it relates to fundamental questions about the human condition, a number of common texts are read by all FYP-ers. This year’s FYP theme is “In the struggle for authenticity amidst conformity, how then shall we live?”