



AREA UNDERGRADUATES SHARE RESEARCH AT CONFERENCE

By Bill Cessato

More than 50 area undergraduates showcased their research projects April 2-3 during this year's student-organized Undergraduate Research Conference, sponsored by NHS.

Students from Georgetown, George Washington, George Mason, and Catholic universities gathered in Riggs Library to share their science- and health-related research through posters and oral presentations.

Frank Torti, former acting commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, kicked off the two-day conference on Thursday evening in the Bunn Intercultural Center with a keynote address about the diverse career opportunities available to students in science.

"Science is a very broad discipline," said Torti. "Your posters support that observation. ...There is something special about science. You are limited only by your own curiosity."

Above: Members of the 2009 student planning committee met with Frank Torti, former acting commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, in Riggs Library.



NHS Professor Kathryn Leonhardy Fioravanti spoke with Jean-Clement Ishimwe and Bridget Nicholson, student participants from Catholic University of America.

Laura Boitano (NHS'10), Roland Dimaya (NHS'09), Kevin Durbin (NHS'11), Armond Esmaili (NHS'11), Harrison Holcomb (NHS'11), and Silpa Thaivalappil (NHS'10) spent a year planning the conference as members of the student planning committee.

They said the experience has taught them how to disseminate scientific findings to a broader audience and gotten them acquainted with the inner workings of putting together a scientific meeting.

Participants presented their posters to a panel of judges during the morning session. In the afternoon, several undergraduates, who had been previously selected by the student planning committee, gave oral presentations about their research. Topics ranged from the HIV/AIDS epidemic to using electronic health records to repetitive physical training in spinal cord injury.

"It is a great opportunity to put theory into practice early in your career and to learn logistical elements of scientific discovery," said Holcomb.

Participant **Timothy Walton (SFS'10)**, turned his focus to the 2008 Chinese milk scandal, a topic he conducted research on while studying abroad at China's Nanjing University.

The Georgetown student took a look at last year's food safety incident in China involving milk, infant formula, and other food materials contaminated with the chemical melamine.

Nearly 300,000 people were harmed, including six

infants who died from kidney stones and other kidney damage. The incident not only raised concern about food safety, but health officials questioned how China's exporting would be affected.

"It was counterintuitive," Walton said. "Most observers were arguing that events like this would drastically affect consumption and foreign investment."

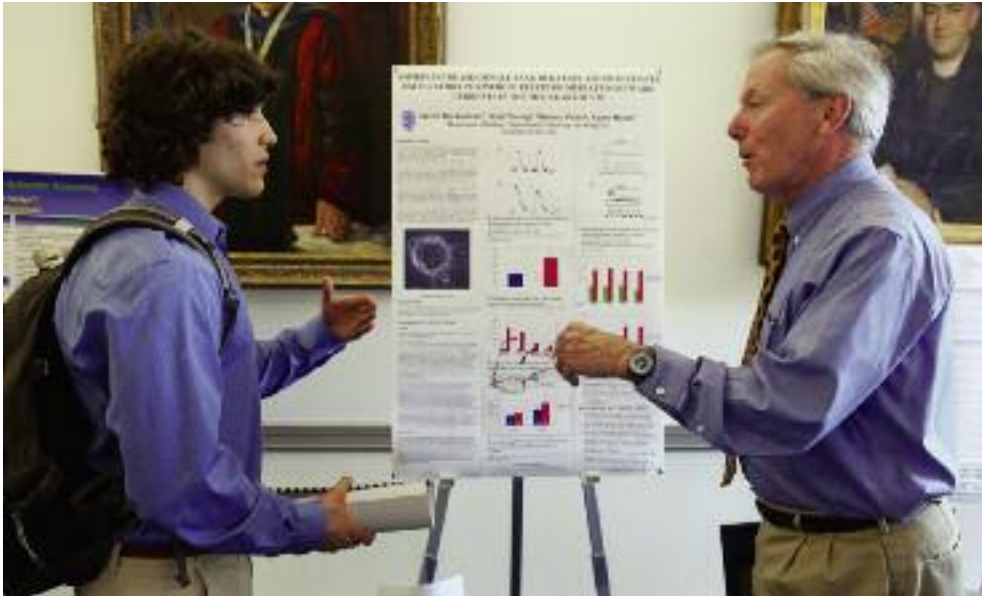
But the student's findings indicated something different. "While the international food distribution and safety system is sensitive to external forces in the short run, Chinese consumer confidence and foreign investment into the industry appear highly inelastic in the long run," Walton said.

Much like Walton, the other undergraduate students gave detailed talks about their work, and for most, the conference provided an experience they could take into the rest of their academic and professional careers.

"It's definitely very helpful in that you get firsthand experience of what research is really like," said **Justin Laracy (C'10)**, a biology major who conducted research on spinal cord injury at Georgetown University Medical Center. "I enjoy explaining what I do."

Bridget Nicholson echoed Laracy's enthusiasm.

"It's exciting to take what we did at our school and present it at another school," said the third-year Catholic University student who gave an oral presentation with classmates **Grace Fitzpatrick** and **Jean-Clement Ishimwe**. They studied cardiovascular disease and nutrition in



Jacob Beckerman (C'11) shared his research poster with Joseph Neale, Paduano Distinguished Professor in the Department of Biology.

“It is a great opportunity to put theory into practice early in your career and to learn logistical elements of scientific discovery.” –Harrison Holcomb (NHS'11)

Washington's Latino population.

Aside from the opportunity to present their work and gain valued academic experience, the students received awards—named this year in honor of conference founder and adviser **Charles Evans**, then-chair of the Department of Human Science—for their presentations.

Nursing majors **Elizabeth Kucharczyk (NHS'09)** and **Leah Ruppe (NHS'09)** won the best poster award for “An Evaluation of a Pilot Educational Program on Nursing Management of Childhood Loss and Grief;” human science major **Stephanie Zare (NHS'09)** won for best oral presentation for “Static Arch Height: A Poor Predictor of Stress Fracture Risk in Male Athletes;” and pre-med student **Elizabeth Seaman (C'12)** earned the first runner-up poster award for “Teen Driver Knowledge about Emergency Situations—an Epidemiological Study.”

Evans, who retired in June, said he was pleased with the conference's growth over the years. The event now attracts five times as many students as it did when it began in 2003.

“It is a wonderful venue for a variety of students with diverse interests to share their excitement with other stu-



Calvin Siow (NHS'09) talked to NHS Professor Kevin Mallinson.

dents in a mutually interactive way,” Evans said. “One of the reasons for having this is for students to learn how to put on a scientific meeting.”

The student planning committee oversaw many tasks, including advertising the conference to area universities,



NHS Dean Bette Jacobs and conference founder Charles Evans, then-chair of the Department of Human Science, posed with the 2009 student planning committee. The committee named the awards given at the conference after Evans.



From left to right: Evans emceed the event. Alexander Tai (C'11) spoke about his research at the conference. Stephanie Zare (NHS'09) also delivered an oral presentation.

reviewing applications, printing 44 scientific research posters, preparing a comprehensive booklet of scientific abstracts, and helping to coordinate catering and audio-visual equipment.

“The conference allowed us to see the different approaches to science that people take in their projects,” added Durbin, a student committee member. “It was fun to see an event come together and bloom.”

SAVE THE DATE

The 2010 Undergraduate Research Conference is scheduled for Thursday, April 8, 2010, in Copley Formal Lounge.