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CAMPUS NEWS

Conference showcases undergrad bio research

By **Nick Smith**
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The science fair, a time-honored tradition of brainy show-and-tell, is not only for the grade school set.

Instead of potato-powered light bulbs and model volcanoes, entries in the 17th Annual Undergraduate Biology Research Program Conference ranged from the effects of cancer drugs on bodily enzymes to a study of T-cells in sharks.

Saturday's conference featured more than 85 students presenting the results of their months-long bio-research projects to friends, family and science enthusiasts.

Each of the students' 3-by-5-foot posters were decorated with pictures, data graphs and conclusions from their findings.

"It's really quite exciting, because you find out what the students have been doing all year," said Carol Bender, director of the UBRP. "The reason this is important is it gives the students an opportunity to talk about what they did."

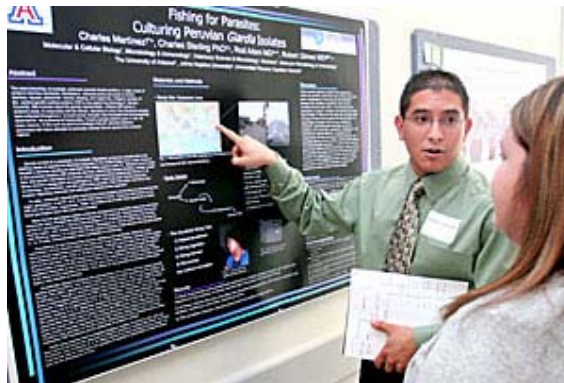
One of the challenges the students face at the conference is not presenting the research itself, but having to explain it to people from a wide range of educational backgrounds.

Roman Covarrubias, a senior studying biochemistry and molecular biophysics, said he needed to make the explanation of his project user-friendly so his audience could understand his findings.

"I have more fun trying to explain it to people," said Covarrubias. "It makes me try harder."

Covarrubias' research centered on the role of T-cells, which identify foreign bodily objects in sharks. He began his research in June, working 40 hours a week, and balanced classes with a 10-hour work week in the fall semester.

The UBRP gives students the unique opportunity to work in a team for a professor in a field they are interested in, as well as sharing publication credit,



Jake Lacey/Arizona Daily Wildcat

Molecular and cellular biology senior Charles Martinez III presents his research, titled "Fishing For Parasites," to molecular and cellular biology senior Andrea Aguirre.

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said Michael Wells, a biochemistry and molecular biology regent professor emeritus.

"In the 17 years the conference has happened, more than 600 students have received publication," Wells said.

Not all the students presenting were undergraduates, however.

Veronica Shi, a junior from Corona del Sol High School in Tempe, presented her proposal for a survey to study a phenomenon called contrast illusion. The forthcoming study would measure brain activity on the perceptions of the color grey when it is viewed on differently colored backgrounds.

Shi said it would be simpler to explain her project to people with a background in optics because they would already have an understanding of the basic concepts.

"If I were talking to a visual scientist, it would be easier," Shi said. "(Otherwise) you'd have to explain everything so you'd understand."

Other students used humor to get their points across.

"I remember squamous (cells) because you 'squam' when you take them out," said Jennifer Avila, recounting a joke her father told her to a group of onlookers.

Avila, a molecular and cellular biology junior, researched the effect two different cancer drugs have on each other.

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