



BIOSPHERE

The Weekly Bulletin of Biology

Biology Colloquium: Friday, 21 November 2014, 2:00 pm in CR 5125

“Multiple Stable States: Theory and Evidence”

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MS Thesis Defense

Edwin Leung will defend his thesis on Wednesday, 19 November at 10 am in MG 4111. His title is, “The Influence of environmental variation on year-class strength in White Seabass, *Atractoscion nobilis*, off Southern California.”

Special Talk on Stem Cells & Cancer

Dr. Peter Gray, from the Salk Institute of Biological Studies, will give a seminar on Monday, 24 November at 5 pm in CR 5126. He will be speaking on the topic of stem cells in cancer.

WiS Discusses Time Management

Women in Science has a regular meeting at 12 noon on the last Monday of each month, so 24 November, in CR 5201. Please join them to discuss time management. All are welcome! Faculty are encouraged to share their experiences.

Students Accepted to Med School

Three Biology students—**Lizzette Figueroa**, **Halley Darrach**, and **Tania Benjamin**—have been accepted to medical school for the 2015 entering class. Garnering acceptances from such schools as USC, UCSD, UCI, and Creighton University is a great victory, demonstrating once again that CSUN students are accepted to highly competitive medical schools. *Biosphere* will present a longer ledger of who’s going where when the dust settles.

New Journal of Student Research Abstracts now Online

A new issue of the *New Journal of Student Research Abstracts* has been published containing abstracts of K–12 student science experiments.

The Oviatt Library hosts a complete [online collection](#) of all volumes, which have been published by CSUN and several partners. Dr. **Steven Oppenheimer** is the journal’s editor.

Presenting at Conferences: What's the Big Deal?

—Cassidy Adlof

I'm a grad student in Dr. **Polly Schiffman's** lab studying the impact of harvest on of the native chaparral plant, White Sage. Over the course of my grad and undergrad career I've made sure to attend and present at as many conferences as possible. I just presented at my 12th conference. I put myself through all the hassle and anxiety because conferences offer opportunities that can't be accessed any other way.

One big benefit is networking. There are several ways to network at a conference. Many conferences have sessions devoted to networking. These can be helpful if you are just looking to meet people doing research in your field. Depending on how broad or narrow the conference is (ecology; plants of southern California; Hispanics, Chicanos & Native American scientists), you can meet an array of researchers inside and outside your area of expertise. Another means of networking is approaching researchers after their talks. It gives you the opportunity to talk with them one on one about their expertise. Often they know about sessions on related research or informal opportunities to network, such as lunch gatherings that are not on the formal schedule. For example, at the Ecological Society of America conference I approached a couple of the speakers to talk about their research on traditional ecological knowledge. They happened to be going to lunch with other researchers in that field and invited me to join. At lunch I talked with

people from all over the globe who I would have never met or had an opportunity to form contacts with.

Another benefit is having the opportunity to attend a diversity of presentations. This exposes you to other disciplines, new ideas within your discipline, and different research approaches and methods. At the same time you get to see a range of presentation styles and formats. You can see what is effective and what isn't when trying to convey scientific ideas and then incorporate those techniques that work into your own presentations.

You also get to hone your own presentation skills. And your research doesn't need to be entirely completed to present at a conference: preliminary data are fine. The thought of presenting at a professional conference can be woriesome, but I have found that it is often a friendly environment (assuming you're not part of a lab that has rival labs). For the most part the people that attend your talk or visit your poster are there because they are interested in that research or work in that field. Many times other researchers will approach you after your presentation to talk about your project and you can learn a lot about alternative methods or additional studies that may be helpful. It is also a good idea to have your presentation judged in a student competition (yes, I said "*good* idea"). Although the judging process is a critique, the judges want you to succeed. They don't shark you like in Proseminar or intentionally try to throw you off. They might ask tough questions about your statistics, but in the end many give you helpful feedback, tips on how to organize your presentation, and alternative analyses.

They might talk discuss how you did at the meeting, or your evaluation may be emailed to you later. Either way having these outside perspectives is helpful.

Presenting builds your reputation as a professional scientist. It gives you the opportunity to share your research with the broader scientific community and to test your ideas. You can also add these presentations to your CV to show that you are serious about your desire for a career in your chosen field.

Conferences can lead to funding opportunities. This is something I didn't know about when I had first started attending conferences. First, you can apply for travel grants (through the society hosting the conference and from various sources at CSUN). By receiving funding, even small amounts, it shows that your research is valued, and you can tell other potential funders that your research is worth their money too.

Presenting at conferences can increase your odds of receiving funding later on. You can list the conferences that you have attended on grant applications. The NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program is one example of this. When I applied, my research plan was not particularly well thought out. In fact, it's a bit embarrassing looking back. What got me the fellowship was the number and diversity of conferences I had attended. The reviewers mentioned that it was good that I went to conferences in my discipline as well as ones that promoted diversity in the sciences. I scored well on broader impacts.

Lastly, conferences can lead to a job or further educational opportunities. At many conferences research organizations and government agencies

set up booths. Many have jobs available or you can network with the people at the booths. Some conferences feature bulletin boards where companies, universities, and government agencies post positions (jobs, grad school opportunities, etc.). By getting involved with some of these groups as a student, you open up more opportunities upon graduation.

If you wish to pursue a Ph.D. many conferences have booths with university representatives. You can talk to administrators from a range of campuses, learn what their programs offer, and talk to current graduate students. You might even meet your future major professor at a conference. This can be helpful to narrow down options before visiting your top two or three campuses.

To strike up a conversation, feel free to [email me](#).

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