The 24th Annual Undergraduate Research Conference Draws in Thousands
On Friday, April 27, 2018, 1,300 students from 21 public higher education institutions across the Commonwealth presented their research at the 24th Annual Massachusetts Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference (MassURC). MassURC promotes undergraduate research across the state and is co-sponsored by Commonwealth Honors College at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, the Massachusetts State University Council of Presidents, and the Massachusetts Community Colleges. Kicking off at 8:00 a.m., MassURC featured 961 presentations from 67 areas of study, over the course of 7 sessions, all ending at 5:00 p.m. Participants traveled from institutions all across Massachusetts, from as far as Cape Cod Community College, UMass Dartmouth, Worcester State University, and Berkshire Community College.

The participating students demonstrated that research comes in a wide variety of forms, much of which was field-based. In order to answer their research questions, some students went above and beyond and ended up with projects that had real-world impact. One presenter, Brian Chua, traveled to Puerto Rico in order to research “A Portable, Low-Cost Method of Producing Medical-Grade Water for Intravenous Solutions.” His research for innovative solutions to the difficulties in supplying people with IVs after Hurricane Maria led to a project that offered solutions. Worcester State occupational therapy students, Kristen Cuccoli, Katelyn McCarthy, Julia Tinyszin, and Cora Marica, worked with their community on their project. They sought to help refugee women in Worcester adjust to their life in a new country with their project “Community Outreach Work for Refugee Women in the Worcester Area.” Through group meetings and projects on their campus, they identified the goals of the women they were working with--own a car, get a driver’s license--and worked to accomplish those goals. “Part of our future goal would be the expansion of ESL programs,” Cuccoli explained. “We believe well being and quality of life are related to group activities.” UMass Amherst students Emily Chandran and Marissa Best similarly engaged their community in their project “Engineering School: STEM Activities for Kids.” In this project, they created innovative ways to engage elementary school students in STEM-related fields by “encouraging curiosity, creativity, and confidence.” Some of their projects involved origami and 3D printing made by the students, which they brought to their presentation.
Not all of the research involved travel or community involvement but featured human subject experiments instead. UMass Amherst student Vishal Arvindam presented his linguistic research “An Eye-Tracking Investigation into the Processing of Stereotypical Gender and the Singular ‘They’ Using Reflexives.” He did this by measuring eye movement across sentences that were structured around gender-based words and corresponding words implicitly associated with gender. He collected data on how long his subjects lingered on each word before jumping to the next. One of the sentences he used as an example was “the baseball player cut herself accidentally,” where people spent much more time reading “herself” than when “himself” was in the same sentence instead.
Still, other students related their research to the goals they have after college and the impact that they would like to make in their fields. Julia Mae Tassinari, an aspiring teacher, shared her research “Changing for the Better” about how LGBTQIA students are treated poorly in schools. “I chose to write about LGBTQIA community because it is an important subject often dismissed in schools. The most important people to hear this research is teachers,” Tassinari said when talking about how she will take this research with her after college, “as an education teacher I will strive to teach my students respect for everyone.” UMass Amherst CHC student Janet Wangoe expressed similar goals of bringing her research on “Physician Bias in Treatment of Cardiovascular Disease and Pain Management” into a better future by incorporating policy recommendations in her research. She talked about how “the presence of physician bias is the result of past and present bias and socioeconomic disadvantages, which become the determinants of health.”
Not all research culminates in a paper, as students projects produced an end product. Emily Graves, a student from Worcester State studying early childhood education, wrote and illustrated a children’s book. The book, titled *Little Rosie’s Wish*, is “A Children’s Book about a Little Fairy’s Big Dream.” She explained that she “wanted to do something that would support the social and emotional wellbeing of children, not just the academic part.”
Students projects resulted in visual art projects, like Worcester State student Jeffery Ellis’s printmaking series “Moving Images,” or Worcester State student Daniel Acuna’s sculpture “The OranguTrump.” Other art projects included spoken word performances, such as Westfield State student Rebecca Lynn Paul’s spoken word piece *Do You Taste Like I Do? A Fiction Piece for the Lonely and Hopeful.*
Additionally, MassURC featured research that addressed issues in the United States as well as worldwide. Several research topics touched on identity within and outside of the United States. One such presentation was UMass Amherst student Guy Junior Jean Baptiste's research on "Language as a Defining Institution of the Francophone Caribbean World." Other presentations included Bristol Community College student Luis Santos's presentation on "Colonialism and Postcolonialism of Puerto Rico Case Study," and Westfield State University student Thomas Joseph Howard's presentation on "Islamic Feminism in the Modern World." UMass Amherst students Lauren Daley and Madison Weitlauf presented on "Maternal Mortality in Sierra Leone and Potential Avenues of Improvement," and UMass Amherst student Lisa Wirada Servaes presented "Mixed Race Identity in Thailand."
Introduction

Francophone Caribbean nations have never been as strong as they are nowadays, and colonized people in various parts of the Caribbean, have been potentiated by the ideals instilled in them by the colonizers. These ideals, which can be seen through these nations’ constitutions, and with which they have become accustomed, now constitute the ideology of the world. As a black immigrant from Haiti regarded as being the main official language, even though the native tongue, I take an interest in inquiring about the French colonization and the consequences of this domination have created relations to the ex-colonized, aiming towards the field of the French languages advantageously.

The Implications

Language is a system of verbal and written communication, conventional communicative purposes.

Steemming from Haiti, and French departments: Martinique, Guadeloupe, and others, the natives: blacks and mulatto, have developed and adapted various creoles. These tongues: average from Haitian Creole, Martinican Creole and Guadeloupean Creole, very different from one another in their grammar and syntax. In these islands, French, although the majority of their population can either only speak one language, and the colonizers.

Assuming a foreign culture

How language-use connects with political questions and ideas of identity and belonging that are prevalent in the world as a whole; particularly ways in which attitudes and beliefs, linguistic and cultural hierarchies developed by the colonizers, can perpetuate the
Guy Junior Jean Baptiste

The keynote speaker for the conference was UMass Amherst Associate Professor of Political Science, Dr. Dean E. Robinson. He congratulated the participating student researchers, telling them that their “work affirms [their] commitments to the values of research and scholarly inquiry, which is what public education is all about.” Throughout his speech, he encouraged and complimented the students’ research through sharing his own. The title of the speech was “The Science of Health Disparities and the Role of Social Movements,” addressing the question “How does inequality get under the skin?.” Dr. Robinson ended his speech with three steps that students should take after they leave the conference in order to continue their studies after college, and use their research to make change.
“Policy outcomes result from pressure that accumulates and builds when ordinary people work collectively on concrete goals. Meaningful change has always taken this kind of political effort. This is the chief lesson of political history. So my charge to those assembled, follow my recipe for meaningful policy change.” Robinson advised. “Step one, keep up the good work, use the skills and training you have for positive ends. Translate your findings into usable knowledge, that people other than academics can understand. Pick your flavor of engagement,
letters to the editors, lobbying, picketing, run for office, but you must reject the view that your research findings alone are enough to move the needle. Step two, establish a work to engagement ratio of 9 to 1. There are many issues we can tackle. Higher minimum wages, paid parental leave, free higher education, eliminating the use of harmful compounds. Pick one. You can pursue a career in perform at the highest standards, which we expect, to represent Massachusetts higher public education. But please devote some of your time to an issue of concern. Step three, join and support and collaborate with groups and organizations that are seeking policy change.”

2019 will mark the 25th year of the Massachusetts Undergraduate Research Conference. We look forward to once again bringing together students to share the depth and breadth of their research.

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