As you might have noticed if you were walking through the Campus Center on April 27, the 18th annual Massachusetts Statewide Undergraduate Research Conference was in full swing. I was lucky enough this year to be able to put some time aside and visit it, and I was definitely impressed by what I saw.

Even though I’m a junior this year, I had never attend the Conference before and I was not sure what to expect. I guess my only real excuse for not having attended in the past was that I a) wasn’t really sure what it was b) didn’t think it really applied to my very humanities-based education and c) wasn’t really sure who was allowed to attend. I wish that someone had addressed this concerns my first year here, because I can safely say now that I missed out on something really cool my first two years.

At the conference more than 800 students from UMass and other public universities and colleges from all over the state presented on thesis or capstone projects, independent studies, community service, and study abroad experiences. There were even displays for visual and performing arts. Most students display posters detailing their presentations and are willing to explain their projects to anyone interested. There were almost 100 students ready to give poster presentations at any given time, and there were five different sessions throughout the day. Some students also presented their project orally in front of a group as a member of three- student panels. As far as who is allowed to attend, anyone interested is welcome - in fact, the point of the conference is for students to be able to share the research that they have been working on, so the more the merrier! There certainly were a lot of science based presentations, but not all the research presented at the conference happened in a lab, as my former self had suspected. No, in fact both my majors were well represented
with titles like “Carlyle, Arnold, and Wilde: Art and the Departure from Humanism to Aestheticism and Decadence in the Victorian Age” and “Age and the Acquisition of Overt Pronoun Constraint in Advanced L2 Spanish Learners.” In fact, the keynote speaker was renowned poet and professor in the UMass MFA program for poets and writers Dara Wier. There were also a lot of really interesting projects that came from disciplines with which I am not so familiar - like a study on the effectiveness of a graphic anti-methamphetamine awareness campaign, plans for fighting childhood obesity in minority populations through dance programs, and a call for awareness and prevention of eating disorders and disordered eating - and those are only a few of the many really cool presentations I got to see.

I was also able to sit in on a few panel presentations and learn about the effects of smoking on the rate of muscle repair, a bluetooth enabled device which can help physical therapists receive information about a patient’s progress without as many visits, and a study about the HPV vaccine. It was a busy day, and a little overwhelming, but I’m so glad I went. It was amazing to discover that so many of my peers are working on such interesting and inspired research. Maybe next year I’ll be a participant, not just a visitor.

Did you attend the conference? What was the most interesting thing you learned?