



Biology Honours students' conference a great success

BY ERIN SPERLING

Few of the 800 students in Biology 1000 would expect to someday be chatting with their professor over beer, but if they end up doing an Honours project, it is almost without question.

Last Saturday, between drinks and a potluck lunch, Biology and Marine Biology Honours students informed the faculty and each other about their thesis research projects, and the response was incredible.

"I don't want to offend any of my professional colleagues, but the presentations that I heard from the students here were as good as the best faculty presentations I have heard in classes that I have attended over the years," said Dr. Richard Wassersug, a professor in the Department of Anatomy and Neurobiology at Dal.

"We have a crop of students here now [who] have the potential to go on to be some of the best academic, biological scholars in North America, based on the presentations they presented. We're not just seeing a few good talks here, we're seeing superb talks," he said. "We're getting a very savvy group of students here and that is noteworthy, particularly in terms of the general impression of huge classes. Yes, we have a few huge classes but we also have a wonderfully tailored, one-on-one Honours program here that is very special and makes for a very strong Biology Department."

This year marked the twelfth

anniversary of the Cameron Conference for Biology and Marine Biology students. The Conference is named after Dr. Lawrence Cameron, now retired from Dalhousie. Cameron single-handedly ran the Biology Honours class in the 1970s. His enthusiasm for his subject, and his teaching, was an inspiration to many students, said Carol Hilton (BSc. 1997), a Biology Masters student and graduate from the Honours program. Indeed, his commitment is evident today, as he attends the Conference every year.

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The activities took place throughout the Biology Department, with posters describing thesis work displayed on the third floor of the Life Sciences Centre.

Dr. Ron O'Dor, Chair of the Biology Department, spoke about the posters and his overall impressions of the Conference.

"There was a set of parents here, which is quite unusual. They were enjoying all the posters. They said they were amazingly diverse and very professional. And I got the same impression from everyone who was listening to the talks and reviewing. Considering students haven't actually finished their projects yet, they do an incredible job," he said enthusiastically.

Dr. O'Dor continued, commenting on the community spirit of the scientific gathering.

"Someone said, 'It's such a pleasure to see the faculty cooking for the students.' We have a potluck

at lunch and faculty actually bring in food. It's a good chance for everyone to talk to everyone [else]...because some of the Honours students have external supervisors in government agencies: Kejimikujik National Park, the National Research Council and the Tupper Building. It's actually an event that brings together researchers from all over the province."

Of course, the focus of the day was on the 44 students and their work. It was important to them not only to interact with the faculty, but also to see the work of their peers.

Mike Biddulph is a Biology student who participated in the event.

"I was really impressed with [the Conference] this year," he said, "I went to last year's and, well, it's always more interesting when you are in it yourself. But the posters were great and the talks went really well this year. Everyone was near flawless. I thought it was really professional. My poster took a little time to make, but other than that it was good. It was a great chance for me to see everyone else's research. I enjoyed it!"

The day would not have been possible without the many volunteers who helped set-up and calm the fried nerves of their peers. Monique Breau, a Marine Biology student and a volunteer, was also

very impressed with the Conference.

"[It is] very professional — [a] very high calibre of presentations and projects. The advisors seemed very enthusiastic about all of their Honours students and are proud of the work that is being done here."

Overall, the Cameron Conference was a success. It combined science and learning in a social atmosphere to create a strong sense of community throughout.

The Twelfth Annual Cameron Conference was dedicated to the memory of Dr. Gary Hicks, a long-time professor in biology, who died last year.

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