

Events Showcase USD Community's Focus on Research

The University of San Diego's celebration and awareness of research work happening throughout the Alcalá Park campus was displayed at both the graduate and undergraduate levels last week.

SOLES' Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice Showcase

On April 18, the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) hosted its inaugural Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice Excellence Showcase where graduate students and SOLES faculty and staff presented nearly 40 interactive posters of research work specifically aimed at some aspect of the theme's three areas.

"I think there is a tendency to talk very generally about diversity and inclusion, but we're not in the weeds about it," said Joi Spencer, an associate dean and associate professor. "Here there's one poster about incarceration and another on early suspension rates of African American kids. It's connected. Children get pigeonholed early on, but if we undo the nuances of inequity, we can create a more diverse society and create better inclusion. I think our students are showing us really sophisticated work. It's not just 'we like diversity,' this (research) is the hard work of diversity."

Bringing together research done within SOLES' individual departments — Learning and Teaching, Leadership Studies, Counseling and Marital and Family Therapy — let everyone learn more about research within Mother Rosalie Hill Hall.

"One of the most important pieces of this event is that it allows the SOLES community to see one another's work," Spencer said. "A student in leadership studies might be working on a project that's similar to one clinical mental health students are working on. Seeing that can lead to them saying, 'hey, let's work together.' Whether they're running a clinic or running a school, they have to learn to work together and they can do that here before they go out into the field."

Research topics, ranging from ideas to aid and better understand student military veterans, examining culture and community engagement for Cambodians, the Asian American Graduate Student experience, an in-depth look by foster care alumni on post-secondary education aspirations, aversive racism theory and multiple explorations about Latina/o leadership, indicate that the SOLES community wants to build more cohesiveness and collaborate.

"The way I might address equity or diversity as an educator might be different than a therapist or a person leading a nonprofit organization. But that's where the nuances of the work related to diversity and inclusion happens," Spencer said. "I think SOLES is really rising, I think SOLES students, faculty and staff see this work as essential to who they are and it's a wonderful start. For me as a faculty member, it's encouraging to see this level of work from our students."

Creative Collaborations

The next day, the 28th annual Creative Collaborations took over the Hahn University Center's three forum rooms, foyer, Student Exhibit Hall and space on the UC's first floor. The event showcased research, scholarship and creative accomplishments of undergraduate students in all disciplines.

"The high-quality work you see reflects the intellectual curiosity of our undergraduate students and their ability to make substantial contributions to society. Creative Collaborations also showcases the commitment of our distinguished faculty in mentoring the next generation of research leaders, as well as USD's long-standing dedication to academic excellence by providing students with experiential and engaged learning opportunities," said USD Vice President and Provost, Dr. Gail F. Baker.

Elisa Maldonado Greene, PhD, USD's director of the Office of Undergraduate Research, said more than 220 abstracts were submitted by students this year.

There was everything from the deeply personal "Cajitas Project," which stemmed from an interdisciplinary collaboration of Ethnic Studies and Theology and Religious Studies classes, to the Shiley-Marco School of Engineering's third SAE Mini Baja Collegiate Design Series' off-road vehicle, a wearable airbag used to protect bicyclists from collisions, and research done on the impact of whale watching boats on Humpback whale behavior in Alaska and the role of digitally enhanced Instagram images on the purchasing habits of USD students.

Seeing the diverse number of projects and knowing of the many hours of hard work put in by USD students is not only a valuable experience for students, but it "has the potential to make real contributions to knowledge and practice," Baker said.

The beauty of Creative Collaborations and its longevity stem from what research truly is — intellectual curiosity. It's answering questions and taking the time to delve into an issue beyond just barely dipping one toe in the water. The scene at Creative Collaborations on this particular year had students standing side-by-side informing you about Education as an Institutional Battlefield for African Americans (a sociology project), another poster featuring a look at the Attack on Frost Giant, a Norse comic book created by a Japanese author (an English student's research) and next is a student explaining his chemistry lab research on Amide-Directed Alkane C-H Borylation.

Together, each student at Creative Collaborations as well as those who presented at SOLES' event, were part of USD's Research Week, which celebrated the tangible impact of research and reminded everyone of the opportunities that exist for Toreros to explore their Changemaker capabilities.

— Ryan T. Blystone

SOLES' Inaugural Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice Excellence Showcase video:
<https://youtu.be/VTazW9-NAhQ>

Creative Collaborations video: <https://youtu.be/jo0vI59N65o>

Videos by Lissette Martinez