

New Mexico AMP CURRENTS
October 2008 Conference Issue

Over 400 New Mexico AMP community college and university students, staff, faculty, and administrators, along with representatives from the New York City, Ohio, and Texas LSAMPS and from Chihuahua, Mexico attended the 2008 New Mexico AMP Student Research Conference at New Mexico State University (NMSU) on October 3rd. In addition, high school juniors, seniors, and advisors from the New Mexico Math, Engineering, Science Achievement, Inc. (New Mexico MESA) program, attended the event.

Dr. Jacob Urquidi, Assistant Professor of Physics at NMSU, delivered the Keynote Address. Dr. Urquidi, born and raised in El Paso, Texas, discussed his current research that involves instrument and software development and the use of X-ray and neutron beams. Focusing his presentation on the importance of mentoring, Dr. Urquidi shared his own journey that has been encouraged and enhanced by very significant mentors from high school through to his tour as a Marine and afterward, to his Ph.D. Without these mentors, Urquidi noted, he would not have accomplished all he has. He shared his own academic struggles, encouraging the students to persist, to seek good mentors, and to learn to ask questions, an essential skill that takes practice. He also discussed his post-doc position in neutron physics at Argonne National Labs and his experience of participating in the discovery of new forms of ice. Then at the luncheon, students had the opportunity to hear New Mexico Senator Mary Kay Papen, a senator since 2000. The senator has championed many important pieces of legislation, including Mental Health Insurance Benefits and the NMSU Performing Arts Complex, among others. She shared her own personal journey as a returning student to NMSU. This experience helps her relate to many of the challenges that students face, especially students who return to school later in life. With an anecdote from her own background, Senator Papen recalled how her mother “dragged” her along on her volunteer work, pointing out that often children learn better by example than by words. This experience instilled in her a desire to serve others and to help them succeed. Senator Papen focused on the possibilities for students of diversity and retraced some of the history of educational oppression and how reform was made possible. She asked the students to remember the hard work that has made this change possible, reminding them that they are “reaping the benefits” and calling for students to not take for granted this privilege and to “give back what they were given” by serving others.

Student research presentations took place throughout the day, with 16 oral presentations and 43 poster presentations. Twelve (12) oral presentations and 33 poster presentations competed for awards. The oral presentation winners were the following: 1st Place: Frederick Crawford, Chemical Engineering, The Ohio State University; 2nd Place: Iris De La O, Conservation Ecology, NMSU; and 3rd Place: Jeremy Bruggemann, Mechanical Engineering, NMSU. The poster presentation winners included the following: Tie for 1st Place: Danielle Miranda, Biology, NMSU and Julie Fernandez DeGraaf, Biology, Central New Mexico Community College; 2nd Place: Heather M. Wade, Pre-Engineering, Santa Fe Community College; 3rd Place Marjorie Ingle, Mechanical Engineering, University of Texas-El Paso.

Students viewed posters and met with NMSU faculty members to discuss their research during the University Research Council (URC) Poster Presentations, then had the opportunity to attend the NMSU Information Fair, with assistance from offices of Admissions, Graduate School, and others. A highlight of the conference was a seminar presented by Jesse McAvoy, Graduate Assistant for Dr. Ou Ma in the NMSU Department of Mechanical Engineering. In this seminar, Jesse informed the audience about his research on the autonomous helicopter that will serve as a base platform for researching visual-based flight controls. After his presentation, the audience moved outside to the East Lawn to watch a demonstration of the unmanned aerial vehicle. Another highlight was the opportunity to see that “faculty are real people, too” by hearing Dr. Steve Stochaj, NMSU Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Dr. Nancy Chanover, NMSU Asst. Professor of Astronomy, share about their research interests and their other passions in life. Drs. Stochaj and Chanover participate in Mesilla Valley Search and Rescue with their dogs, Phoebe and Splash, both field certified, wilderness search dogs who compete at the national level in the sport of dog agility. Phoebe and Splash then demonstrated some of their skills outside.

Pre- and post-conference workshops were held to help community college students navigate the conference, make the most of the conference experience, and learn more about transfer to four-year universities. Thanks to all who attended the conference gave their all to make the 2008 conference one of the BEST we’ve ever had!!