

Historical Review—Over the Years of the Undergraduate Symposium

The Undergraduate Symposium, hosted by the College of Arts and Sciences, serves as a showcase of research and creative academic excellence at Eastern Michigan University emphasizing a tradition of outstanding student achievement. The annual event has grown in both size and distinction since its inception in 1981.

Dr. Ronald W. Collins, former Provost of Eastern Michigan University, envisioned the event. The Parents' Association provided the financial support and Ira M. Wheatley, past department head of History and Philosophy, provided leadership for the initial Symposium. The first Symposium held April 3, 1981 in McKenny Union featured 17 students sponsored by 19 faculty members from nine departments of the College of Arts and Sciences.

The next year the Symposium added a luncheon that included James V. McConnell, Professor of Psychology from the University of Michigan, as the first keynote speaker. During the following years, speakers included: Marjorie Lansing, EMU Professor Emeritus of Political Science; Dr. Anthony England, former NASA astronaut; Dr. David Adamany, former President of Wayne State University; Rodney Slater, EMU alum and former United States Secretary of Transportation; Dr. Fiona Wood, Director and Chief Medical Officer of Clinical Cell Culture of Perth, Australia; and Dr. Toni Hoover of Pfizer Global Research and Development.

The addition of poster displays in 1990 brought students another means to present their research projects and creative endeavors.

The Symposium included student participants from the College of Education and the College of Technology in 1992. The College of Business and the College of Health and Human Services nominated students for participation the following year. Students representing all of EMU's colleges have participated in all subsequent events.

In 1995, Ted Vosk and Cynthia Stemple served as the first student emcees of the Symposium, creating a tradition of choosing multiple-year participants for this position.

Beginning in 2000, with the support of the Office of Financial Aid and the Graduate School, twenty University Fellowship Awards for Symposium Participants were made available to graduating participants to encourage them to continue their graduate studies at Eastern Michigan University. Since then additional scholarships have been established to support participating students continue their undergraduate studies: the Barry A. Fish Scholarship and the Ronald W. Collins Memorial Endowed Scholarship for Undergraduate Symposium Participants.

Web casting of select presentations began in 2002 with Symposium XXII. This technology allowed yet another way to further showcase student academic success to a wider audience including back to the presenters' hometowns and schools.

On April 1, 2005 the Symposium proudly celebrated its 25th event. In honor of the event's longevity, a new scholarship series was announced. Fully endowed, this eight-series scholarship will be awarded to Symposium student participants from across all disciplines of the University. This silver celebration also provided the opportunity for 25 select Symposium and University alumni to return to campus for the festivities including: Dave Coverly (1985 English Language and Literature), cartoonist and author of Speed Bump; Ermelinda Harper (four-time student

presenter in Biology and Chemistry), environmental engineering doctoral student at Yale; and Emery Lee, III (1990 Political Science) assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University.

Year 27 took the event to its new home, the EMU Student Center. In honor of the new facility and the long-standing support from the Division of Student Affairs, Genesis, a bronze sculpture by artist and Symposium XXVII keynote speaker Brent Collins, was dedicated and permanently placed on the second floor of the center.

The nomination process moved online for the 28th event. The online submission process allowed for more seamless gathering of information on both the student participations and their presentation.

The planning committee continues to develop the event that Donald F. Drummond, Dean of the College in 1981, hailed as “an important milestone in the efforts of the College of Arts and Sciences.” Dennis Beagan, department head of Communication and Theatre Arts, leads this committee consisting of faculty representatives from each department of the College of Arts and Sciences and representatives from each of the other four colleges.

Former College of Arts and Sciences Dean Barry Fish proudly acknowledges the significance of the event: “Each year’s symposium is a unique and treasured event. Our students’ exceptional enthusiasm, impressive abilities, and wide range of topics and their mentor’s able and caring guidance, exemplify what’s best about EMU and our higher education system.”