

AUSTRALASIAN CONFERENCE OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

Liam McCann enlarged his mind by attending the first Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research hosted by Macquarie University.

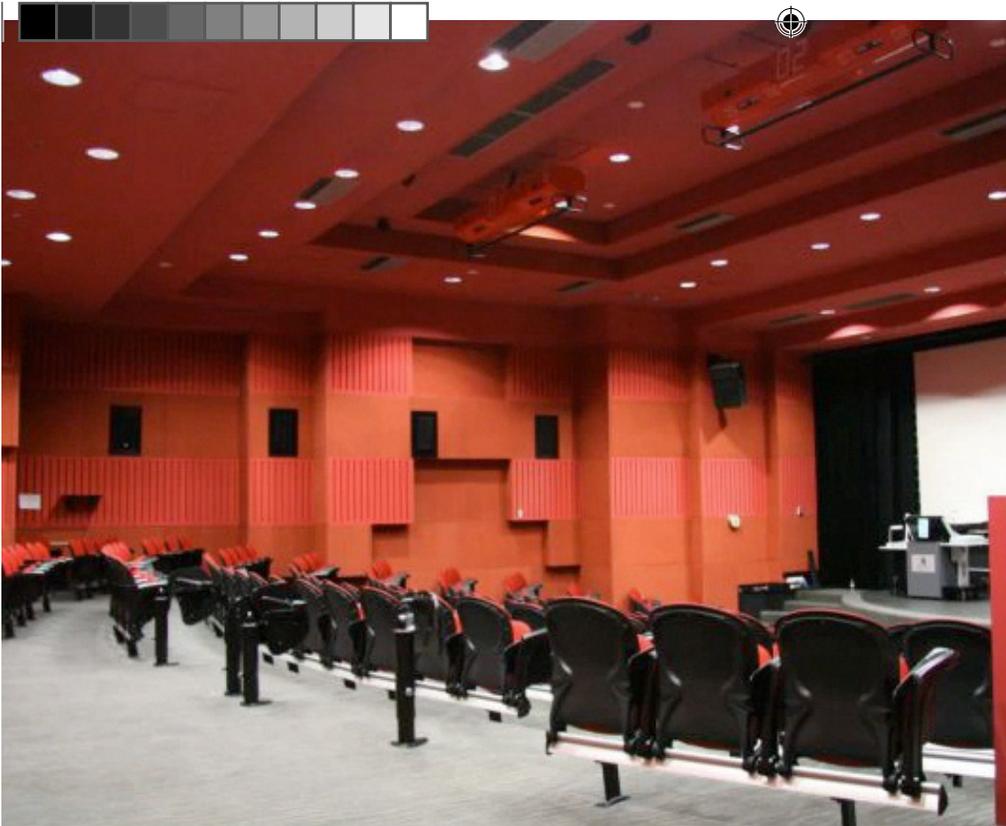


Throughout my experience of studying at Macquarie, the amount of innovative and original projects I have come across is astounding; from projects on psychological trauma in 17th century art, to the effect copyright has on everyday cyber interaction; evolutions in autistic education and even the role of dance in personal happiness. However, despite Macquarie's focus on being a premier research education facility, there had been very little in terms of allowing undergraduates of different disciplines to interact and share ideas. As a consequence, Macquarie has established the first of the Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research (ACUR) to facilitate this development in research capabilities and to allow students to

interact in a safe and welcoming research environment. Of course, Grapeshot was there to see how the event turned out.

One of the interesting things that resulted from the way that the event was organised was the distinction between speaking seminars and poster presentations. Throughout the event, it could be seen that while some papers were presented in the traditional lecture format (of 20 minutes each, to allow for questions afterwards), other presentations were presented in the form of a large poster, allowing for creativity and innovation in the presentation of these papers. In these cases, the researchers could actively walk around and engage in singular conversations with interested parties, allowing for a more personal approach in exchanging ideas.

One of the most interesting presentations was a discussion about manga by Rebecka O'Mailey. In handing around manga, she actively engaged her audience; instead of merely talking about it as an abstraction, having this art in the audience's hands greatly enhanced understanding; people could compare the different categories of manga and see the differences between them. As a result, she then made a very insightful point in the way manga is utilised for an educational purpose; if a student is less anxious through an immersion in the literature of a language, it means their uptake of the language in an educational sense is much less of a problem, especially for people who do not have a language background. Furthermore, the evocative images that are used to highlight the storylines within further this immersion



One of the most interesting things about this conference was the way in which academics and students so easily exchanged ideas, and the way in which students could have ideas that might be dismissed at first glance gain a sense of acceptance when expanded on; several times I looked over the audience of some talks and saw a group of interested and curious first year students, several third or fourth year students asking insightful and expansive questions, and even lecturers and heads of departments sitting, taking notes as if experiencing the students' ideas for the first time. It was remarkable to see that every person was engaged and willing to develop their own ideas from the material.

All in all, from the ways in which people came out with widened horizons, a new appreciation for the ways in which



in the language; through exaggerated and wild representations of culture, the foreign reader can find themselves being further drawn in through the use of cross-discipline media. Therefore, O'Mailey essentially suggested that language courses should move away from the strictly regimented textbooks that are traditionally used, and move into utilising popular culture and more accessible literary works in order to draw students into the subjects, and also to keep them studying these difficult courses, reducing the attrition rates within a discipline.

Of course, these presentations were not limited to Honours program students. One of the best presentations of the day was presented by Julia Wylie, a second year biology student who had begun a

study of the presence of invertebrates in roadside communities compared to inland communities. Through this study, Wylie took a quantitative analysis of whether insects were affected by the height of their habitat, whether the presence of vehicles affected numbers, or whether they were most affected by the climate in which the soil was extracted from. It would probably surprise the typical observer that the presence of vehicles in an ecological location has far more of an effect than the typical carbon emission effect; as the construction of roads disturbs the soil, leading to a less secure habitat for the wildlife to construct communities in. Even though there were some minor problems with the study, this proved to be a highly advanced presentation far beyond what is generally expected from a second year student.

research is delivered to wider audiences, and even a breaking down of the barriers between undergraduate students and their postgraduate mentors, it could be said that the ACUR conference was a resounding success for the vast majority of students that participated; if nothing else, they gained a new appreciation for the role and development of research methods, and the ways in which these research opportunities influence both academic careers and personal life skills. The personal gains from participating in this conference in future can only be beneficial whichever path you intend to take; there's no reason not to consider it, is there?

by Liam McCann