

Annual Conference Report  
Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science  
Kansas City, MO  
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The Center for Marine Biodiversity and Conservation (CMBC) and Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) co-led the symposium “Marine Biodiversity and Conservation: Multidisciplinary Research Approaches in the Marine Sciences,” and co-sponsored an oral and poster competition in marine science at the Annual Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) conference in Kansas City, Missouri October 11-14, 2007. The conference was attended by 2500 faculty and traditionally under-represented students interested in pursuing graduate education and careers in science.

CMBC/SIO – co-led a multi-institutional team from Scripps Institution of Oceanography (Diversity Liaison Sarah Mesnick, Graduate Coordinator Dawn Huffman and graduate students Damien Cie, Elisa Maldonado, and Serena Moseman), the Southwest Fisheries Science Center and the Northeast Fisheries Science Centers (NOAA Fisheries Service), the Long Island Sound Study, and the MS PHD'S® in Earth System Science/University of South Florida.

Last year’s symposium was the best attended of the entire conference. Unfortunately, this year’s symposium was not as well attended because of a scheduling conflict with a similar symposium. The first half of the symposium consisted of talks given by faculty/professional researchers including Sergio Sanudo-Wilhelmy and Corey Garza on marine research, on professional pathways, and on the status of under-represented minorities in the marine sciences. The second half of the symposium was devoted to a “Words of Wisdom” graduate panel, comprised of masters and PhD graduate students and an open discussion. Casual interaction followed.

In the abstract competition of the general conference, awards were given for the top two graduate oral presentations and the top three undergraduate poster presentations, with an additional honorable mention. All participants received frame-worthy certificates of achievement for their abstract presentations. Gifts were given to the oral presenters (donated by CMBC-SIO) and gift bags were given to the poster presenters (donated by CMBC-SIO and Northeast Fisheries Science Center).

It is important to note that while SACNAS is growing rapidly, there were only 65 graduate student oral presentations. While this number is triple that of the number in 1999, the need for encouraging minority graduate education in the sciences is clear, as is the need for research opportunities and the mentoring of aspiring undergraduate students. Also of interest was that of the 65 graduate oral presentations, only two were competitors for the award in marine science.

The goal of our team was to provide a diverse community of undergraduate and graduate students, professors, and administrators access to expertise within the marine sciences. The conference was successful for several reasons and on many levels.

(1) Institutional diversity. We have put together a group of professionals from academic and government institutions which span not only the geographic breadth of the country but also represent the range of academic stages (undergraduate mentoring, masters, and PhD) and career options (academic and government research science). The team was constructed to illustrate opportunities and to create new networks.

(2) Inclusion of Graduate Administrators. At the symposium, graduate administrators such as Dawn Huffman were included as essential links in the path to applying to an institution of graduate education, such as SIO. We pre-empted fear of the application process by introducing Dawn (and other graduate administrators) as part of the support network we put in place.

(3) Inclusion of Graduate Students. The best voices and words of wisdom are often offered by those with whom prospective students can best relate – other students themselves. We included outgoing and successful undergraduates in the planning of the symposium, in the graduate panel, and in the judging and mentoring aspects of the program.

(4) Promoting Marine Science Nationally. Growing interest in marine science among minority students was captured by the first-ever SACNAS oral and poster competition. In the judging, we included not only those that submitted under the title, but searched for abstracts submitted in other fields such as Ecology, Environmental Science, Physics, and Biological Sciences, that were presenting marine research, and included them in the competition, doubling our participation and promoting inclusion in the field.

(5) Awarding Excellence. We gave generous awards to oral and poster presenters including a fee waiver for the UCSD graduate application and SIO sweatshirts. Additionally, gift bags were donated by the SIO Development Office. All participants got impressive-looking “Certificates of Achievement” signed by all the lead institutions, suitable for framing.

(6) Creating New Networks in Marine Science. Networks of professionals beget networks of students, and vice versa. For example, several of the CEA-CREST students are interested in attending SIO, and some of the MS PHD’s have already interned at SIO and the SWFSC. All of these parties were able to mingle at the conference; personal connections enhance the probability of following up good intentions. Over time, we expect these casual connections to become established pathways among students, professionals, and institutions.

