

Four UCSD Students Win Library Research Prize for Exemplary Research Skills

At a university hailed for its stellar faculty research, undergrad students follow suit

October 29, 2008 – Four undergraduate students at the University of California, San Diego have received the 2008 Undergraduate Library Research Prize for their outstanding research skills. The prize, which is co-sponsored by the UC San Diego Libraries and the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, includes cash awards of \$1000 and \$500 for upper and lower division students respectively.

"The winners of this year's Undergraduate Library Research Prize reflect the high level of intellectual inquiry and accomplishment that UC San Diego has become known for," said Penny Rue, UCSD's Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. "Students come here to learn from the best and brightest faculty but they also play a very important role in the research enterprise. Learning to conduct effective research is a critical part of their academic experience so it is gratifying to see our students so adroitly exploiting the vast network of knowledge and information resources available at the UCSD Libraries."

"The UC San Diego Libraries are pleased to recognize this year's Library Research Prize award-winners," said Brian E. C. Schottlaender, the Audrey Geisel University Librarian at UCSD. "They clearly demonstrated the outstanding research skills needed to achieve academic excellence at UCSD and beyond. Their thoughtful and strategic use of a wide range of library resources, from specialized databases and library bibliographic tools, to electronic journals and manuscript collections, was compelling."

To be considered for the Undergraduate Libraries Research Prize, students are required to present their work at the annual UCSD Undergraduate Research Conference held in the spring. The conference, sponsored by Academic Enrichment Programs (AEP), a unit of Student Educational Advancement under Student Affairs, is one of three major undergraduate scholarly meetings that AEP coordinates each year that afford students from all academic disciplines the opportunity to present findings of research conducted under the guidance of UCSD faculty members.



In the social sciences, arts, and humanities, first prize went to Mary Tharin for her honors thesis on religion and politics in Pakistan at the end of the 20th century. An International Studies major with a double minor in political science and history, Tharin, who was nominated by Hasan Kayali, a professor of History, graduated in June of this year. She is currently interning as a research associate for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, a nonprofit organization focused on foreign policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.

"My project was completely driven by the research process," said Tharin. "As I delved deeper into more specific primary sources, I began to see first-hand the motivations that lay behind the actions of many historical figures. I came to realize that a deeper understanding of the subject material could only be gained by going to the original source. I am very grateful for the research tools that were available to me at the UCSD Libraries that enabled me to produce such an intellectually stimulating project."

Second prize went to Michael Hirshman, a history major, who was nominated by UCSD History professor Cynthia Truant. Hirshman's honors thesis on Napoleonic Spain traced the British and Spanish paths to war in 1804, which led to a key battle in the Napoleonic era and eventually to the Battle of Trafalgar. Hirshman is a senior and is spending his last year studying abroad in Spain, not far from the where the events he chronicled in his thesis took place.

"Working on *The Guns of August*, 1804 proved the highlight of my undergraduate career," said Hirshman. "Yet, the composition of the 82-page paper was not the most difficult part. The most challenging and rewarding part of my work was scouring for primary and secondary sources. In this process, the UCSD Libraries— and some very knowledgeable, helpful and patient librarians—proved to be an invaluable resource."

In the life and physical sciences, Steven Shimizu, a double major in chemistry and chemical engineering, received first prize for his research project involving the synthesis of zinc oxide, which is studied widely for its optical and semiconductor properties. Shimizu, a senior, was nominated by Joanna McKittrick, a professor in the Department of Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering.

"The UCSD Library system continues to keep up to date with current trends in researching, including transferring resources online and teaming up with Google to provide books in digital format," said Shimizu. "The ease of use and quality of resources aided my research tremendously; the resources of the UCSD Libraries exceeded my expectations in all aspects of my research."

Second prize was awarded to Jacqueline Acuna for her research on maternal behaviors related to infant emotions, stress, and shared attention. Acuna, a cognitive science major, was nominated for the prize by Gedeon Deak, a professor of Cognitive Science. Acuna, who graduated in June, is currently working in the Cognitive Development Laboratory at UCSD and is planning to apply to graduate school in her field.

"Conducting library research is the backbone of any kind of research," said Acuna. "Advances in technology have made it easier than ever to stay informed and current on any particular area of study and have completely changed the way I collect and organize my background information. However, these tools are of no use if you don't have the skills necessary to capitalize on them. A researcher must be open to new ideas and at the same time critical of every source of information."

According to Catherine Friedman, Associate University Librarian, who oversees the Library Research Prize contest, this year's winners were very astute in using the expertise of research and subject librarians and archivists who could save them multiple steps in their research efforts.

All entrants, said Friedman, must be nominated by UCSD faculty members and are judged based on: the significance of library materials used, including print, electronic, and primary resources; demonstrated expertise in mining library collections, including identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing a variety of materials in the

generation of research; and evidence of significant personal learning and the development of substantive research and inquiry skills over time.

According to David Artis, director of AEP, more than 140 UCSD undergraduates reported their research findings at the 2008 conference. A large crowd of family, friends, lab partners, and mentors attended the all-day event in support of the undergraduate participants. Members of the audience listened attentively and often engaged the undergraduate scholars in lively question and answer sessions after the respective 15 minute oral presentations.

With Increasing regularity, undergraduates at UCSD and other selective and demanding colleges and universities act as research assistants to faculty members and with faculty mentors, said Artis. The students contribute to the generation of new knowledge on topics of local, national, and global interest. At UCSD's most recent conference, students presented research findings on a wide range of subjects, including a chemical analysis of the San Diego River, the effect of sports-related head contact on intercranial pressure, and an examination of structural depletions within the human genome, among other topics.

Ranked among the nation's top academic research libraries, the UC San Diego Libraries play an integral role in advancing and supporting the university's research, teaching, and public service missions. As the intellectual heart of the UC San Diego campus, the nine university libraries provide access to more than 7 million digital and print volumes, journals, and multimedia materials to meet the knowledge and information needs of faculty, students, and members of the public. Each day, more than 7,300 patrons visit one of the UCSD libraries and more than 87,000 people access library resources through the UCSD Libraries main Web site.

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