

Tuesday, Mar 14, 2017

Graduate students showcase research at annual OU conference

Nearly 100 students presented at Oakland University's second annual Graduate Student Research Conference, which took place March 10. The event spotlighted a diverse array of research topics and was keynoteed by Dr. Kathie Olsen, a neuroscientist whose career includes leadership roles at NASA and the National Science Foundation.

Dr. David Stone, Oakland University's chief research officer, noted the value of having Dr. Olsen on campus as a role model to aspiring science and technology professionals.

"Kathie Olsen started her career as an undeclared major at a small college, she fell into biology by accident and rose to the top of the federal science community," Stone said. "What a great reminder that where you start doesn't dictate where you finish."

Following breakfast and registration, the day started with a 90-minute block of oral presentations held in various rooms of the Oakland Center. Thirty-five students delivered oral presentations, with topics ranging from health care and medicine, to physics and engineering, to accounting and finance, to the social sciences.

Showcasing a variety of research topics helped to broaden the conference's appeal across campus, according to Physical Therapy faculty member Dr. Christine Stiller, a member of the faculty committee that organized this year's event.

The oral presentations were arranged in breakout sessions consisting of four to five presenters, with each presentation running 15 minutes. Each session featured presentations on related research topics, with presenters from different academic areas. Stiller moderated a session with presenters from Oakland's School of Health Sciences, School of Computer Science and Engineering, and the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine.

Stiller said that bringing students together from different areas helps promote collaboration and interdisciplinary learning. The experience also prepares students to present at professional conferences around the country.

"It's a great opportunity for graduate students to develop their presentation skills, but also for undergraduate



graduate school could lead them,” Stiller said.

After the oral presentations, the event continued with a series of poster presentations by students from each of the university's schools, along with the College of Arts and Sciences.

Claudia Petrescu, dean of Graduate Education at OU, said this year's conference featured twice as many presenters as last year's event.

“Students see this venue as the key venue to present their work, to connect with other students and to be in the spotlight,” Petrescu said. “It is wonderful to see how important this conference is becoming to OU.”

When the presentations concluded,



Kathie Olsen

attendees gathered in the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms for lunch and a keynote presentation by Dr. Olsen. The former Deputy Director and Chief Operating Officer of the National Science Foundation and Chief Scientist at NASA shared stories from her career and touted the robust outlook for high-paying jobs in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, especially those requiring advanced degrees.

“A Ph.D. opens the door to so many opportunities,” Olsen said. “You will have a job.”

She also emphasized the importance of diversity, noting that women are still underrepresented in science and technology.

“Diversity is critical for best products,” said Olsen, pointing to examples such as voice recognition technology. “If you have a diverse team, your products are going to be better.”

Aside from money and prestige, Olsen cited what she called the “ultimate reason” to pursue a STEM career.

“When you choose science and technology, you choose immortality,” she said. “Research has a lasting impact and is really good for society.”

Learn more about OU's graduate education programs at oakland.edu/grad.

Learn more about research at OU at oakland.edu/research.



From Left: Claudia Petrescu, Kathie Olsen and David Stone.