

UConn Undergraduates Participate in Universitas 21 Undergraduate Research Conference in Amsterdam

Fifty-four undergraduates from 21 universities around the world divided their time during a week in July between exploration of Amsterdam on bicycles and sharing details of their research projects with each other and fourteen accompanying faculty and staff members. Each undergraduate researcher was selected to represent their home university. The University of Amsterdam hosted the five-day [Universitas 21 Undergraduate Research Conference](#) (URC). Research presentations were given in the heart of the Dutch canal city in the 14th Century Agnietenkapel, the recently renovated site where the University of Amsterdam was founded in 1632. (Full details of the conference program are available [here](#).)

UConn junior, Julianne Norton, presented her project "Canvassing Generations: Art through Postmemory." This creative project began in summer 2012 with a Holster Fellowship and continues in summer 2013 with a Christopher M. Lewis Fund Award as part of UConn's Summer Undergraduate Research Fund (SURF) Program. Her project mentors are Professor Deborah Dancy and Associate Professor Ray DiCapua, Art & Art History. In her work, Julianne investigates the relationship between "postmemory," the memories of traumatic events passed down to subsequent generations, and art. In part a theoretical study of postmemory and in part creative expression through painting and poetry of her own familial postmemory of the Holocaust, Julianne presented a combination of research and performance.



Agnietenkapel, Universiteit Van Amsterdam

Photo: Jvhertum (Own work) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AAgnietenkapel-gate.jpg>



Julianne Norton, Agnietenkapel, Universiteit Van Amsterdam

Photo: Nina de Groot
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/98576896@N08/9282309508/>

Julianne Norton said:

My favorite part of URC was meeting people from all over the world. I made an effort to talk to every single person at the conference and I'm so glad I did. From Singapore to New Zealand to Ireland, every person I met had unique insight and so much energy in their respective fields. We worked hard and played hard - listening in rapt attention to each presentation every day then exploring the beautiful lit streets of Amsterdam at night. Though the conference was only a week, we quickly felt like close friends.

At UConn, within my own select academic community, it's easy to get wrapped up in very specific and specialized areas of research. However the URC included students from many different fields. I found that I had to not only communicate my topic, but also try to convey why my peers should be interested. I think that stepping back from my work so early into my thesis project, as a junior, gave me invaluable perspective.

For those who are hesitant to start a research project, I would say this: Ask a question you are genuinely interested in, and seek the answer. In my two years at UConn, I have found overwhelming and unrelenting support in the form of advice, funding, and now the extraordinary opportunity to present my artwork internationally. Undergraduate research is the "hidden" value of our university: through it, I have been able to take charge of my education and share that enthusiasm with my peers from all over the world.

Participation in the [Universitas 21](#) URC 2013 by UConn students and staff was supported by the Office of Global Affairs and the Honors Program. The [URC](#) is an annual event. UConn representatives have participated in previous conferences in Australia, China, and Japan. Future opportunities will be publicized by [UConn Study Abroad](#).

May 2013 graduate, Stefanie Walker, presented her geography Honors thesis research: "Public Perceptions of Flooding in Hartford, Connecticut." The project, focused on the Blue Hills community, was supervised by Assistant Professor Carol Atkinson-Palombo and funded by UConn's Center for Transportation & Livability Studies. Through a discussion of findings from a 2012 community survey, Stefanie explored problems and perceptions of storm flooding in Blue Hills. She discussed community reactions to Low Impact Development options, particular storm water management techniques designed to preserve natural hydrology (including porous pavement, ponds, and swales). Stefanie said, *"For me, the most important aspect of the URC 2013 was getting to see research being done by researchers in different locations and cultures from my own. Urban areas often experience similar problems during the development process, and it was interesting to see how others had solved their problems or prevented these problems from occurring."*

Margaret Lamb, Director, Office of Undergraduate Research participated in the URC 2013 faculty and staff program, which included providing feedback and support to the student presenters. She said, *"It was a privilege to get to know so many undergraduate researchers from around the world. The students' excitement and interest in each others' projects was wonderful to experience. In our home universities we talk with students about the importance of presenting research to new audiences and imagining a subject from different perspectives. In Amsterdam, the audience was truly diverse and shifting perspective was the name of the game!"*



Yellow Bicycles Used by URC2013 Participants to Travel the City

Photo: Nathalie Tsang

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153012182490704&set=o.655769684451125&type=3&theater>



Stefanie Walker with Dr. Victoria Graham and Nezo Sobekwa, University of Johannesburg, NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam

Photo: Stefanie Walker



Jingyi Mei, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Margaret Lamb, NH Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam

Photo: Jingyi Mei



URC 2013 Participants at the IAmsterdam installation, Museumplein

Photo: Julianne Norton

Links:

U21 conference website: <http://www.universitas21.com/event/details/128/undergraduate-research-conference-urban-challenges>

UvA conference website: <http://urc2013.uva.nl/urc-2013/rc43-conference-and-summer-programme/rc43-conference.html>