Senior Health Science Majors Show what They've Learned with Final Research Posters

Clotilde Dudley-Smith, Sacred Heart University
Excited to start new chapters in their educational experiences, approximately 45 Sacred Heart University seniors vying for their bachelor’s degrees in health science recently displayed their final research posters to faculty judges.

Clotilde Dudley-Smith, assistant professor, College of Health Professions, and Stephen Burrows, chair, Health Science & Leadership, and program director, healthcare informatics, assessed and scored the presentations.

“This is their final, major requirement and the culmination of four years of work,” said Burrows. “Topics are all health-related and very broad and illustrate a required related research paper. Each student had to formulate a hypothesis, then prove or disprove it based on existing research and show results.”

Burrows noted that the program has had consistently great students, who are moving on to graduate professional programs in such categories as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech language pathology and physician’s assistant. “We’ve had a very good success rate for students being accepted into these programs,” said Burrows.

Dudley-Smith reflected on how the program has grown over the years. “This is our largest class yet since 2010,” she said. “We started with five presentations then. Word has spread that this is a great path to graduate health-care programs. The reason we have them do these processes is so they will learn how to create and show presentations. I can do it now, but I had to learn it along the way. This gives them a head start.”

Isabel Pagan’s poster topic was “Impact of Aquatic Exercise in Treating Older Adults with Arthritis.” She concluded that “exercise only has short-term effects, according to research. Buoyancy does support joints and muscles, allowing patients to exercise with less effort and greater range of motion.”

Pagan plans to pursue occupational therapy and is open to working with any population—children, adults and geriatric adults. “I work as a lifeguard, and we do an aqua-zumba program that inspired me,” she said. “My topic definitely relates to my goals of helping people overcome pain and become more independent.”

Carmen Ortega based her poster on the topic “Does a Traumatic Brain Injury Increase the Risk of Dementia in Veterans?” She found that there is a lot of strong evidence indicating a connection, but more research is necessary.
“My husband and I were both in the U.S. Marine Corps. He was injured, suffering a severe, traumatic brain injury,” she said. That led to my interest in this topic. I wasn’t satisfied with what some of his providers had to say and wanted to know more.”

Ortega plans a career in health-care administration and credited Sacred Heart with giving her a solid foundation. Her educational experience has had a secondary benefit as well: “SHU provided me with the tools to be a better patient-advocate for my husband,” she said.