

Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Rachel E. Bowman

February 14, 2017

College of Arts & Sciences Hosts Inaugural Faculty Showcase

Rachel E. Bowman



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The University Commons area and adjacent classrooms at Sacred Heart University were a hive of activity Feb. 8 as SHU's College of Arts & Sciences hosted its inaugural CASCon event.

The conference showcased the work of 55 faculty members from multiple disciplines. They formed 15 panels to provide presentations that emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of faculty scholarship and reaffirmed the College's commitment to faculty scholarship and undergraduate research. A wide range of disciplines was represented at CASCon, including psychology, biology, chemistry, marketing, art & design, media studies, sociology and theology/religious studies.

Rachel E. Bowman, chair of the Psychology department and lead organizer of CASCon, said the conference "highlights the work faculty are doing outside the classroom, which is often connected to course content. This is an opportunity to model for students how faculty ask questions and the various research and creative approaches used to problem solve. The end benefit is that students see the application of material, become more aware of opportunities for engagement and get excited about their own participation. The benefits of undergraduate research are numerous, and our goal is to involve as many Sacred Heart students as possible."

The initial idea for CASCon was inspired by an event held by SHU's Jack Welch College of Business that effectively highlighted faculty research in a poster session format, a common feature of professional conferences. Bowman noted that CAS was interested in modeling its event after a professional conference as well. As such, CAS faculty received a call for proposals in early fall 2016. The CASCon organizing committee reviewed all proposals and then thematically grouped them into a panel format that mimics the structure and feel of a professional conference.

Robin Cautin, dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, agreed. "A key purpose of the event was to facilitate students' involvement in undergraduate research," she noted, adding that "one-on-one collaboration between students and professors on a research/scholarly project is a formative educational experience for students. It is also an important instantiation of the role of mentor on the part of faculty—a role that Sacred Heart professors hold dear."

The mentoring relationship enables the fulfillment of Sacred Heart's mission to take a holistic approach to educating students, addressing not just intellectual aspects of the person, but also the social, emotional, ethical and spiritual as well.

Students responded positively to CASCon. Freshman Sarafina Pavlak, a communications major, sat in on a session titled, "Vampires, Super Villains, Teenage Girls and Other Scary Things: Popular Culture in the Lives of Millennials." She remarked afterward, "It was really interesting to see the different perspectives on the growth of female characters."

Sophomore Victoria Smarkucki, a psychology major, waited to attend a session titled "Sustainable Tourism," noting, "I'm in a research and design class, and I'm supposed to learn how to research various subjects in society. I hoped this would give me good strategies and approaches."

Sara Monaghan, also a psychology major on track for a degree in education, attended the "Technology and Values" session, about which she planned to write a one-page paper for extra credit. "I'm challenged by technology, but found aspects of the talk that related to my field of study," she said.