

# From Poetry to Psychology, Meredith College Celebrates Student Achievement

By Katrina Kempney, '11

Students from across Meredith's disciplines presented their research during the 10th annual Celebrating Student Achievement undergraduate research conference on Tuesday, April 17. Many who presented had personal connections to their projects or used their presentations as a chance to find in-depth answers to questions that arose during regular coursework or extracurricular activities.

Art student Natalia Lopes completed a short animation called "The White Deer" which is on display in the Johnson Hall rotunda art show. Lopes based the project on a short story she had written.



"One day I just decided to try writing a fairy tale, and what came out was a fairy tale-like story that addressed contemporary issues such as the environment, relationship equality, and animal rights," said Lopes. "I wanted to explore different ways of telling a story, as our generation is now becoming used to reading and telling stories in so many different ways."

Elizabeth Warren undertook research in psychology, guided by Cynthia Edwards, professor of psychology. Warren said, "I wanted to see if there was a relationship between identification with a young adult literary hero and identity development in young adult women."

Her project, "Hermione or Bella: Identification with Literary Heroes and the Development of Identity among Young Adult Women," explored the possibility of such a relationship. She was attracted to the topic because of her experience with young adult literature.

"Like most people, I have felt a connection with characters [...] in that I have grown up with them, faced my own obstacles, and at some point have felt that these characters are friends of mine," said Warren.

Even though her hypothesis was not supported by her research, Warren still relished the chance to participate in CSA Day. "Sharing my research with the campus community has been a terrific experience," she said. "I have felt that this is an opportunity to celebrate all of the hard work and dedication of students and faculty members in arts, academics, and research."

Another Meredith student who presented her research, Michelle Maiden, had a personal connection to her project on Alzheimer's disease. "One of my grandmothers lived with this disease for 15 years before passing away the summer before I went to college."

Maiden's project, "A Possible Link Between Alzheimer's Disease and Copper," explored possible root causes behind the disease. "Our hypothesis is that metals such as iron and copper may cause the protein plaques that are the

hallmark of Alzheimer's disease, and that the combination of these metals and the plaques cause the neural damage seen in patients," said Maiden.

Mary Rawls' project began as an assignment for General Education requirements that gave her a chance to explore in-depth a topic outside of her discipline of study. "Another student and I paired up with a faculty member to study popular culture in America. I knew I loved Harry Potter so I talked with my professor about incorporating that into my project," explained Rawls. "I then ended up asking why Harry Potter was so popular in America though it is very British. How has Harry Potter become such a global phenomenon?"

She and her advisor, Steven Benko, assistant professor of religion and philosophy, investigated. "I used theories of mass culture, Americanization, and globalization to study Harry Potter and its success. This was a great experience and I learned a lot from it," Rawls said. "This opportunity gave me a chance to completely learn something new about writing, presentation, and the analytical study of popular culture."

Both students and faculty at Meredith agree that participating in Celebrating Student Achievement is a beneficial part of attending Meredith.

"I think students can be inspired by the events on CSA Day by seeing what their fellow classmates are accomplishing," said Natalia Lopes.

Michelle Maiden touted the chance for students to experience real-world use of valuable skills. "I think that CSA day is a great time for students to hone their presentation skills in front of a supportive audience," she said. "I also think that it cultivates a sense of pride in the research being done at Meredith."

Benko agreed that CSA Day gives students a chance not only to explore new areas of study but also to participate in an important Meredith event.

"Students get to show off their writing, research and presentation skills," he stated. "And I think that doing it in a very public forum pushes them to express themselves better, and in a more sophisticated way, than before."

An academically-focused tradition also sends a positive message those outside the Meredith community, according to Benko. "It shows that Meredith students are serious about their education. To stand up in front of a room full of people and say, 'This is how I have spent my time, and it is worthwhile for you to hear about it,' shows that Meredith students take themselves and their academic careers seriously."