

Science@CornellVet

A science blog straight from the students and trainees of Cornell Vet

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A day of data and insight

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Every year, the Biological and Biomedical Sciences (BBS) Symposium takes place on the Friday before classes officially start. And each year, different fields within the College of Veterinary Medicine take turns organizing and hosting the event. This year, the Department of Population Medicine hosted the event, choosing the overarching theme of “Medical Frontiers: Turning Data into Insight.”

The theme was first introduced to the audience by Dr. Renata Ivanek, a faculty presenter. Ivanek stated, “Data is only valuable if we can translate it into usable insight,” setting the theme for the remainder of the symposium.

An effective avenue for growth



Barnard presents her research

Each year, students present their research using posters and oral presentations. Karen Barnard, a fourth-year graduate student from the Parrish lab, was one of the invited student speakers and spoke about viral tropism. Barnard fondly remembers her first symposium as a first year and used the symposium as a marker of the progress she’s made throughout her graduate career: first being an incoming student and using the day to learn more about Cornell, then presenting posters and using that day to trade ideas with her peers, and then this year, giving an oral presentation. She also emphasizes that the symposium is a critical venue for first-year graduate students because it “gives them a chance to see what research is done within the program and a chance to talk to the graduate students, which really gives them a sense of what the BBS program is composed of.”

Robert López-Astacio, a first-year graduate student, agreed with Barnard. “Each current graduate student helped me narrow down options for each rotation,” says López-Astacio. “The talks opened my mind to new areas of research/topics, and the symposium did an excellent job bringing together the fascinating branches of the program.”

The intersection of humans, technology, and health

The event culminated with the Keynote Speaker, Dr. Theresa Bernardo from the University of Guelph in Canada. Bernardo spoke

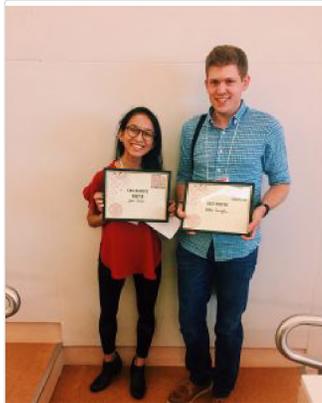
about the increasing “connectedness of the world” and how this is impacting progress with a Data into Insights theme in mind and a One Health perspective. She reminded the audience of how technology has made the world smaller, and how seemingly minuscule changes have the largest impact on society. She explained how there are currently 8 billion people in the world, of those 8 billion, only 4.5 billion having access to sanitary and working toilets—but 6 billion having access to cellular phones. This accessibility to phones contributes to the increase of “citizen science” and to the progress of health, with technology aiding in combatting infectious disease and gaining insights into the natural world.

Bernardo highlighted how technology is the newest frontier for medicine. For example, the accessibility of cellphones has played a role in many epidemics, including the Ebola outbreak of 2015 by reporting real-time local outbreaks to medical aide professionals. She reminded the audience of the privilege to have a cellphone and encouraged audience members to consider incorporating technology into their own research. Dr. Rachel Jennings, a member of the planning committee, hopes that the talk would encourage audience members by “stimulating the innovation needed to tackle today’s emerging problems. It is easy to become consumed by your own research and lose awareness of what other people doing especially those in the same college.” The question-and-answer session after Bernardo’s talk made it apparent that attendees had a fresh interest in data innovation through technology, and a renewed awareness to keep the “One Health” mindset for any type of research.



Dr. Bernardo giving the keynote address

Symposium student highlights



Tabilas and Pennington win poster awards

Congratulations to Erica Lachenauer, a combined DVM and PhD from the Stover lab, for winning best oral presentation. Erica spoke about her mother sparking her interest in infant health and how she is working to ensure no baby is born with spinal defects. In addition, congratulations to Matthew Pennington, a fifth year from the Van De Walle lab, for winning the Best Poster presentation, Yun Ha Hur, a second year from the Cerione lab, for winning Runner-up for Best Poster Presentation, and Cybelle Tabilas, a second year from the Rudd lab, for winning Fan Favorite Poster Presentation!

-Cybelle Tabilas, second year graduate student in Immunology and Infectious Diseases

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