

Undergrad presentations seek legislative attention

On Thursday morning at Capitol Hill, purple “Wildcat” ice cream was given to members of the Utah Legislature by Weber State University alumni groups and undergraduate students presenting research projects.

The WSU Day at the Capitol underwent its 10th year with 21 different undergraduate research posters and 19 projects. Many students were at the Capitol presenting for their first time. WSU President Charles Wight, also a first-timer, went around to each research poster to learn more. He said the variety of subjects represented was incredible and that most of the students at the event are finishing up and going on to medical school or graduate school.

“Oh, it’s amazing,” said Wight, surrounded by a sea of purple ties and jackets worn by WSU alumni supporters and students. “It really shows what Weber State students can accomplish as part of their undergraduate education.”

The emeritus alumni have been part of the WSU Day at the Capitol since its beginning. In previous years, they would journey up to the Capitol to speak with Utah lawmakers and remind the legislature about WSU issues. Now, for the fourth year in a row, the alumni group has invited undergraduate students to present their research projects in the rotunda of the Capitol building and hopefully gain the attention of the Utah legislative body.

Wight met with the emeritus alumni last night to discuss where WSU sits on the legislative agenda and what messages to give to legislatures in order to support WSU in the 2013 legislative session.

“I think we have great support from our local legislatures, and a lot of them are in leadership positions,” Wight said. “There is a lot of uncertainty now about not only the state



(Photo by: Raychel Johnson) President Wight learns about Scott Nagao’s undergraduate research project on frog skin disease.

budget, but the federal budget, and so it's hard to be really predictive about what's going to happen as the final outcome, but I know we have great support."

The planning class in the geography department assisted students with their undergraduate research project. Brad McIlrath, a WSU student, helped with the project titled "Ogden WSU Intermodal Hub Site Plan." The project highlighted a new plan for a WSU center in downtown Ogden where there will be a testing center and dorm-style housing. The project also highlighted a new bus route or streetcar that would travel from WSU's Ogden campus to downtown.

Although a lack of funding prevents this plan from actually occurring, McIlrath said that, as economic development increases, public transit and mass transit becomes extremely important. He also said presenting the project would help him prepare for a job in the future.

"It's going to be valuable in that aspect, and I think it's going to be even more valuable in trying to help Ogden City revitalize its downtown area," McIlrath said. "This is what Weber State is doing, and this is applicable to real life."

Besides presenting to lawmakers to keep their emphasis on WSU, these undergraduate projects also help these students prepare for medical school and beyond. Scott Nagao, a senior studying microbiology, presented his poster on a skin disease of frogs. He worked with a mentor who started the project in Texas, but Nagao still has work to do.

"I started last semester, so it's been about 10 months or so," Nagao said. "I'll probably finish it midway through the summer — so a few years when all is said and done."

Nagao said he wasn't afraid of talking to people he doesn't know, and this has to be a tactic in order to get the legislatures to come over to the posters.

"It's good to get people to know that there's stuff going on with Weber State and the Forest Service, and I also will help promote the College of Science, because it's super-underfunded," Nagao said. "Our science building, it was built for a certain amount of people, and we are over double that amount. . . . It's pretty nasty up there."

Jeremy Peterson, a representative from Ogden, said the rotunda was a good place to

“mingle and meet and get good information.”

Peterson, who was outfitted in a purple tie for the occasion, also said this was his first time meeting with WSU undergraduate students and alumni.

Alex Lawrence, the vice provost for innovation and economic development, attended this year's and last year's Day at the Capitol, and said both years have been really good.

“The students are really doing fascinating and impressive things,” Lawrence said. “You can't help but be impressed. I mean, they have done a lot of work, and it's interesting work. It's stuff that's meaningful, things that I'm actually kind of fascinated (with). Some of the studies they've done, some of the work in the community — I'm impressed.”

Other stories you might be interested in:

By Raychel Johnson February 7, 2013.