

UBCO Undergrad Wins International Award in Australia



Andrew Hughes, a psychology (honours) student at UBC's Okanagan campus, has returned to Kelowna from the Universitas 21 (U21) Undergraduate Research Conference in Melbourne, Australia, having earned the "Best Presentation" award for his innovative undergraduate research.

Hughes and 36 other students from 15 countries -- representing 23 of the world's top research universities -- gave oral presentations at the annual conference, which brings together students from around the globe to showcase their research for an international audience of fellow students and academics.

"I feel that I have really contributed something valuable to the scientific community," says Hughes, whose research investigates the relative competencies of the brain's left and right hemispheres in processing emotion. "Having my presentation recognized in this way signifies that I have been able to successfully communicate my passion for research to others. I feel more encouraged than ever to continue my education."

His work suggests that positive emotions are processed more efficiently with the brain's left hemisphere, while negative emotions are processed more efficiently with the brain's right hemisphere. The research also shows that positive emotions are processed more efficiently by either hemisphere alone, while negative emotions are processed most efficiently by both hemispheres together.

"I have a new appreciation for research in all areas of study," Hughes says of his experience in Melbourne. "I got a chance to interact with some of the brightest young researchers in the world, each one bringing something bright and different to the table."

Students were inspired by one another, helping each other to pursue new avenues of research that they might not have previously considered, he says. "I will take with me from the experience an appreciation of culture, new friendships, and different ways of thinking."

Cynthia Mathieson, Dean of the Irving K. Barber School of Arts and Sciences, says Hughes' achievement reflects the strength of undergraduate research opportunities at UBC's Okanagan campus.

"Andrew's best presentation award is an international showcase for the outstanding work that is conducted by our students through opportunities created in the Undergraduate Research Award Program in the Barber School," she says. "Andrew is to be congratulated for his achievement. He is an inspiration, and his research indicates the high standard of excellence that characterizes our undergraduate research at our Okanagan campus."

Hughes returns to UBC's Okanagan campus this fall for his final year of undergraduate studies. He plans to continue his research as an honours project.

"Ultimately," he says, "I hope to become a neurologist, while continuing to carry out research."