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Conference Celebrates 25 Years of Student Research

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – When Illinois Wesleyan University’s student research conference began, President George Bush occupied the Oval Office, the reunification of Germany dominated international discussion, and the film *Pretty Woman* was making Julia Roberts a star in movie theatres nationwide.

Twenty-seven students participated in that first conference in 1990, prompting President Emeritus Lloyd M. Bertholf to urge organizers to keep it up, according to an article in the April 13, 1990, edition of *The Argus*.

Keep it up they did. Renamed in 1996 for explorer and geologist John Wesley Powell, the 25th edition of the student research conference occurred Friday and Saturday with more than 140 students participating. The conference is evidence of the great value Illinois Wesleyan places on undergraduate research and demonstrating strong faculty-student collaborations and mentoring relationships, organizers said.

In his remarks at the luncheon, President Richard F. Wilson made reference to the conference’s consistent emphasis on student-faculty collaboration and the exploration of new ideas, noting John Wesley Powell was an early advocate of today what we would call “active learning.” Powell, who was a faculty member at Illinois Wesleyan in the 1860s, took his students on field expeditions to the American West.

To commemorate the 25th anniversary, alumni participants were honored at the luncheon. Nick Timme '08, who is currently a Ph.D. student in physics at Indiana University, was one of those attending.

A double major in physics and philosophy at Illinois Wesleyan, Timme said his participation in John Wesley Powell his senior year was the first time he had presented physics material to a general audience.



Peggy O'Neill '91 presents her findings at the 1991 conference.



Video link



Luncheon keynote speaker Dr. Paul Black (center) talks with student presenters.

“Taking the work and shaping it to the right level for the audience was a good experience,” said Timme, who later published his work, “The mode shapes of a tennis racket and the effects of vibration dampers on those mode shapes” in the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*.

Another alumnus, Jordan Ault '04, said he was “flattered” to be invited to the 25th anniversary commemoration and eager to come back to campus.

“I sat in on some of the oral presentations, and they were very well done,” said Ault, a political science major who is now an attorney in St. Louis.

“It’s neat to come back and see the work product of these students. There’s a certain energy exhibited that makes you proud to be an alum.”

Faculty serving on this year’s committee were: Conference Co-Chairs

David Vayo, Fern Rosetta Sherff Professor of Composition and Theory, and Leah Nillas, associate professor of educational studies and conference co-chair; along with Stephanie Davis-Kahl, Scholarly Communications Librarian and associate professor; Edgar Lehr, assistant professor of biology; Michael Seeborg, Robert S. Eckley Distinguished Professor of Economics; Chris Callahan, professor of French; and Tao Jin, assistant professor of religion.

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