

FEATURING

Photo by Ryan Duda



REVOLUTIONARY RESEARCH

MSU students explore their passions through research

BY MAGGIE MORGAN

Undergraduate research at MSU has been on the rise lately, and many students are making their college careers meaningful by participating in hands-on, research-based environments. Research is a vital part of learning because it allows students to think critically and analyze various situations. Students from each major are constantly encouraged to think outside the box and question what they do not understand. This promotes research in a way that makes it a learning experience, which allows students to explore multiple passions.

Since MSU is a Big Ten university, it allows students to participate in research programs that receive international recognition and have renowned reputations for producing groundbreaking projects. When people think of research, the first thoughts that come to mind are of science and data. But research exists in every college and every major. The university offers unique opportunities for collaboration between students and faculty that effortlessly combine the academic and creative sides of research.

The best way for MSU students to showcase their research as undergraduate students is to enter their project into the annual University Undergraduate Research and Arts Forum (UURAF). This is MSU's main showcase for undergraduate research, scholarship and creative work. UURAF allows all the undergraduate students to engage with, participate in and exhibit original work.

First place recipients in the Humanities and Performing Arts section of UURAF, Ryan Duda and Evan Phillips, are theatre majors who created "Farm the Musical: Theatre and Autism." The musical is a collaboration of efforts from students across all majors at MSU to create an original musical that is specifically geared toward children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

"We knew that theatre had significant educational benefits for children with autism, but we wanted to be able to create tangible evidence for ourselves. It is one thing to read about research and to watch videos of

interactive musicals being performed for this audience, but it is an entirely different thing to experience all of that for yourself," Duda said.

The pair was able to conduct their study with a sponsorship from the Michigan State University Department of Theatre. Duda felt that they couldn't have accomplished their goal without MSU's generous support. He and Phillips were able to use their sponsorship to take trips to New York City and meet with theatre professionals who are actively working in pursuing the same mission.

"Without our 2016 trip, we might not have received the information or connections we needed to complete this project. UURAF was also beneficial in allowing us to present our research to peers who did not have the same deeply passionate biases that we had," said Duda. "The feedback we received helped us to better focus our research plan for the following year."

Alternatively, Claressa Smith, a junior studying psychology and youth in society, has been participating in SONA all semester. Through SONA, she is able to study "interpersonal processes and psychotherapy," through labs where she and her lab partners interpret "interpersonal relationships in psychotherapy settings." She first became interested in doing this research when she attended a psychology research fair, where she was able to meet individually with the lab directors. Here, she expressed her interest in the research and that she was looking to gain experience. Smith is also a big supporter

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of students from all majors participating in research projects.

"To get involved, no matter what major, talk to professors of classes you like. They are a great resource to possibly have you get involved with their own research but can also direct you to someone who is looking for undergraduate research assistants," Smith said.

MSU is a suitable place for undergraduate students to explore many different activities, majors and interests. Research is quickly becoming a typical aspect of education at MSU because it is no longer reserved solely for students pursuing science-related majors. All students, from theatre majors to STEM majors, are encouraged to participate in research studies. Since asking critical questions is a crucial part of learning, many students turn to research projects to explore their passions and majors.

Maggie Morgan is a junior majoring in professional writing with a concentration in creative writing. Hobbies include: spending all of her money on concert tickets, trying to convince Green Day to let her be their friend, geeking out about music history, dreaming of writing for Rolling Stone. You can follow her on Instagram at @svagie_maggie.



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