

Appreciation Day showcases STEM talents

STORY AND PHOTO BY JEANETTE WRIGHT
NEWS EDITOR

Clackamas Community College's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) club is one of the largest student groups on campus. To celebrate everything the STEM club does, they showcase student work.

CCC's STEM Appreciation Day was celebrated Thursday with the STEM club hosting student presentations in the Community Center and a student question and answer panel in Gregory Forum.

From noon to 4 p. m. students from various science classes at CCC presented class projects for display and peer review.

From poster boards explaining experiments and research on extraction of spider DNA to interactive projects like a 3D printer, students got to present their work to classmates and fellow students.

Students filled out critique sheets for each others work, judging based on experience and what they thought could make it better.

Presenting projects is a hands-on way of learning how to introduce your information in an understandable way and get useful feedback from peers, said CCC student Elizabeth El-hajj.

"I think it's really helpful, especially since we're a really tightly-knit group," El-hajj said. "Everyone has a different perspective and different thoughts, a way of how to improve."

Peer review will become more prevalent later on in ones career, so the practice is important, El-hajj said.

CCC students Nathan Walker and Will Nilson displayed their physics lab presentation, a resonance board using a speaker and sand to show the effects of vibration waves.

"It's kinda cool to show different scientific principles and ways that people can see and understand," Walker said. "It's a lot more fun than a class, I think, and you can learn it a lot faster."

Introducing people to STEM and its different fields is another purpose of STEM day.

"I think it encourages a lot of curiosity, and different concepts," Walker said, "so it can help people who maybe weren't considering STEM fields before kinda think 'oh, this is interesting' and different specific experiments could

encourage them to look into it more."

Tory Blackwell, a CCC biology instructor, said students gain a lot of "soft skills" at the presentations, like oral communication and presenting and explaining work, which could lead to internships and lab opportunities.

Students talking with others outside their STEM field helps them get out of their group and build networking skills, Blackwell said.

"There's a lot of cross-communication, and that's what creates that interdisciplinary perspective on science that students really need to have by the time they get to finishing their four-year, starting a masters, a PhD program, or any of that cool stuff," Blackwell said.

STEM day gives the STEM club a rare chance to shine.

"If you look at some of the other groups, like art, music," Blackwell said, "they have regular performances that are open to the public so you have a way, as a student, to appreciate what they do, but we don't really have anything like that for the STEM students, and they do a lot of work, and really nobody gets to see it."

CCC's STEM club regularly hosts events at CCC for students in and out of STEM, including twice-monthly STEM talks funded by CCC's BUILD EXITO program.

The program, funded by the National Institutes of Health and in collaboration with Portland State University and eight other regional partners, is designed to help bridge the gap in diversity currently present in science, according the CCC website.

The STEM club's panel on Thursday was a Q&A with four former CCC students now attending PSU in STEM fields.

The panel originally included Joey Heisler, Joanna Meskel, Annaliese Hernandez and Candice Stauffer, though Stauffer was unable to attend.

Medina Lamkin and Mary Lee were the president and vice president of the CCC STEM club this year, and are both BUILD EXITO scholars.

Lamkin and Lee were excited to have former CCC students talk about their experiences.

"We're kinda out of the way, there's not a lot that happens out here; most of it happens at PSU," Lee said, "so it's



Medina Lamkin (left) and Mary Lee (right) served as the president and vice president of the STEM club this year.

kinda cool that students here can go see a 'real' scientist give a talk about their research without having to travel all the way to PSU."

Because CCC is a two-year college, instructors aren't typically conducting their own research, which provides different opportunities for students than at four-year schools.

"Community colleges tend to be focused on education and learning, so I really like that part," Lamkin said, "even though you don't get exposed to research, you get really good teaching, you get really good teachers who want to teach, and do their best to teach you stuff [and] help you learn."

Former students can not only give advice about how to get to another school or program, but can also ease anxiety, Lee said.

"Having [the students] come back

and maintain that network across the transfer is really important," Lee said. "As we become professionals, having that support system, that network in order to succeed later in your career is really important. And it starts here at Clackamas. We want to help bridge that gap."

CCC's STEM club is open to students from any major or area.

"It's a way that we can introduce people to different topics because it encompasses so many fields and if you're focused on one thing you may not be exposed to other things," Lee said. "And it's another way to spread general knowledge about science and all the careers and things you can do with it."

STEM club meetings are held on Wednesdays from 5 to 6 p.m. on the Oregon City campus in Pauling 132.