

VIMS researchers share findings at Sea Grant Symposium

By Erin Kelly

(January 29, 2013) Students, staff, and faculty from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science took part in Virginia Sea Grant's 4th Annual Project Participants' Symposium last week, sharing their efforts to protect and restore coastal Virginia during a daylong event at the Science Museum of Virginia in Richmond.

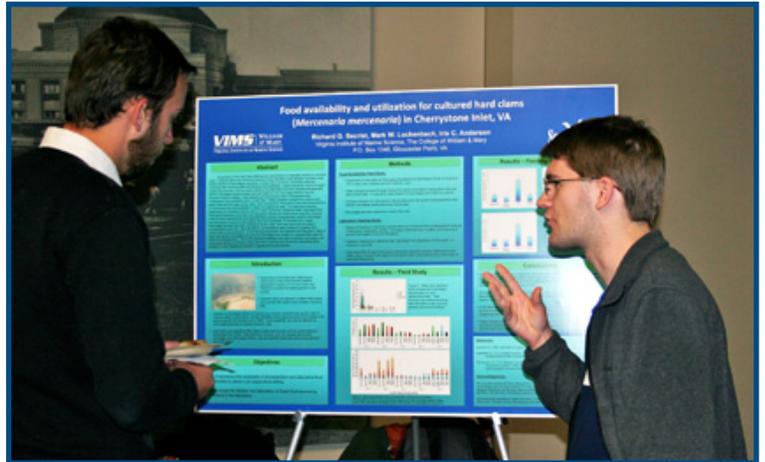
The event offered VIMS researchers an opportunity to network with other scientists from around the Commonwealth who work with Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) through funded research, extension, education, communication, and other partnerships. VASG partners with researchers at George Mason University, Old Dominion University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, and Virginia Tech.

"The symposium is designed to encourage networking, identify emerging opportunities, spark innovation, and form new collaborations," says VASG Director Troy Hartley. "I'm looking forward to seeing where these connections lead."

VASG's Graduate Research Fellowship Program helps to fund the research of several students in William & Mary's School of Marine Science at VIMS. The fellows are chosen on the basis of academic achievement, relevance of their research to VASG goals, and demonstrated interest in outreach activities. There are currently two classes of fellows, for 2011-2012 and 2012-2014.

The 2011-2012 group consists of six fellows, five of whom are pursuing their graduate work at VIMS: Ph.D. students Andre Buchheister, Ryan Schloesser, Jonathan Lefcheck, and Wendi Quidort; as well as recent VIMS graduate Sarah Sumoski. To kick off the event, Buchheister, Schloesser, and Lefcheck presented their research to an audience of approximately 75 people.

"It was both gratifying and challenging to present my research to the audience," says Lefcheck, whose studies focus on Bay scallop restoration and micro-predators. "I was able to see the practical applications of my research to something that the average person cares about and has a stake in, but challenging because I had to find and clarify those applications."



Poster Session: VIMS graduate student Gar Secrist (right) explains his research to VIMS Ph.D. student and VASG Graduate Research Fellow Jon Lefcheck during the poster session portion of the symposium. Photo by Erin Kelly

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Buchheister presented “Uncovering Connections to Inform Ecosystem Management” explaining how he describes and classifies fish diets as well as evaluates the drivers of those dietary patterns. Schloesser explained how his studies of variation in the condition of young summer flounder, striped bass, and Atlantic croaker help assess fish recruitment in Chesapeake Bay.

The five fellows in the 2012-2014 VASG group include four Master’s and Ph.D. students from VIMS: Anna Murphy, Ryan Schloesser (repeat fellow), Mark Stratton, and Xiaoyu Xu. All attended the symposium.

A number of other faculty and staff from VIMS presented their research during the event, including professors Iris Anderson, Mark Brush, and Kim Reece. VIMS’ Marine Education Specialist Lisa Ayers Lawrence, Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Extension Specialist Karen Hudson, Breeding Research Manager Anu Frank-Lawale, and Program Manager for the Comprehensive Coastal Inventory Program Marcia Berman also gave the audience a brief synopsis of their research.



VIMS Ph.D. student and VASG Graduate Research Fellow Jon Lefcheck presents his research to the audience.

Jenifer Alonzo, an assistant professor of communication and theatre arts at Old Dominion University, served as the keynote speaker. She spoke about collaborating across disciplines and overcoming vulnerability. “The conversations that were triggered by our keynote speaker really got us thinking outside of the box,” says Hartley.

“VASG did a wonderful job in arranging speakers that were relevant and dynamic,” says Lefcheck. “Undoubtedly the most talked-about was the keynote speaker who wove an interesting story on communication, collaboration, and rejection using audience participation that included a prolonged exercise in touching fingers with a stranger. Definitely a strange but interesting way to make her point!”

More information about the symposium and Virginia Sea Grant is available at <http://vaseagrant.vims.edu/>.