A Novel Award: Eukaryon is Recognized on a National Level

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Pictured from left to right: Eukaryon 2010 editor Michael Fiske, editor-elect Alina Konnikova, and previous faculty advisor Dr. Pliny Smith.

As I walked down the hall to interview Dr. Smith, I passed numerous journals, posters, and scientific articles lining the tables, walls, and doors. Journals such as Cell, Nature, and Science feature articles published by prominent scientists presenting groundbreaking work. We, as students, often use articles published in these journals as models when writing our own articles. Scientists work throughout their careers to produce enough data to publish an article in one of these journals. Lake Forest College’s biology department has produced a similar journal, Eukaryon. Much like the journals Cell, Nature, and Science, articles are submitted and either accepted or denied for publishing. Outstanding articles written for classes are most often accepted into Eukaryon and published in that year’s journal. Just as having an article published in a national journal is considered a significant success, having an article published in Eukaryon is also considered an accomplishment and an honor. Students at Lake Forest College may consider having an article published in Eukaryon as a sign that they are doing well, but, how can Eukaryon know that it is doing well? This summer, the journal was recognized on a national level at the Annual Meeting for the Society for Developmental Biology (SDB) in San Francisco, California.

At the SDB meeting, Dr. Smith chose to present two posters. One poster detailed the work done in the last year in his developmental biology lab, detailing muscle development in C. elegans. The second poster focused on Eukaryon and was presented in a special teaching section. Over 20 poster presenters in total competed for the teaching award, but Eukaryon took home first prize. This is the first time Eukaryon has been recognized at a national conference for its success as a teaching tool.

I asked Dr. Smith why he felt that this award was so important, and he replied, “Eukaryon’s recognition at the SDB meeting validates the important and positive pedagogical role of an undergraduate produced journal. Specifically, our poster received the education award because of the efforts made by the leaders of Eukaryon to critically assess its impact on course curriculum.” Dr. Smith firmly believes that one of the reasons Eukaryon has been so successful both on a campus and a national level is because of this critical assessment. The assessment carried out by Eukaryon members is what gave Eukaryon such a competitive edge at the SDB. Dr. Smith explained, “The hard data presented in the poster shows that Eukaryon has had a definite positive impact on the biology department.” The survey Dr. Smith refers to is a unique survey carried out by Eukaryon members hoping to improve their organization. A survey was sent out to all members of the biology department asking questions regarding their awareness of Eukaryon and scientific literature in general. Along with this data, a ‘future goals’ section on the poster indicated specific aims for potential improvements within the organization. These specific aims included making all students and faculty on campus aware of Eukaryon and increasing exposure to prominent scientific literature.

In many ways, Eukaryon has been somewhat of a science experiment in itself. Eukaryon began as a simple hypothesis: what would be a great way to highlight student work in the sciences at Lake Forest College? This idea was then tested over the next five years. Eukaryon began as a small online journal started by a few Biology students in 2004. Only 17 articles were featured in the online-only publication in 2005. The few students who began Eukaryon had no idea about how big of a success it would one day become. Like most science experiments, data was collected in order to validate the effectiveness of the journal. The surveys conducted by Eukaryon members collected enough data to be analyzed, and once this data was analyzed it was placed onto the poster and presented at the Society for Developmental Biology meeting by Dr. Smith. This data helped to confirm that Eukaryon was successful not only within our college community, but also on a national level.

Since its beginning, Eukaryon has been a collaborative effort between Lake Forest students and faculty. Currently, students are working together with faculty advisor Dr. Shubhik DebBurman to create an even better journal than last year. The Writing Center has also been involved with this year’s journal, helping to improve both the Review and Copy-Editing Boards. Even students not majoring in science have become involved in Eukaryon.

Dr. Smith agrees on the collaborative success of Eukaryon. He says he cannot stress enough how much of a joint effort the poster and the presentation were. “Shaun Davis, Mike Fiske, and Dr. DebBurman helped tremendously with the development of the poster. It really was a joint success.” Dr. Smith also commented on how hard the board worked last year to produce a cohesive and interesting journal. Countless hours were spent working on the journal by members of the three boards to not only put together a high-quality journal, but also to get it published on time.

The success of Eukaryon has been a shared victory between Lake Forest faculty, students, and the college community as a whole. The recognition that Eukaryon received on a national level after Dr. Smith presented Eukaryon’s work at the SDB meeting reflects on the entire college community. The current members of Eukaryon can only build on the accomplishments made by former members over the past five years.

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