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COVID Can't Stop SNC's Undergraduate Research Forum

St. Norbert College

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Subash Lamichhane '21 is researching the effect of the neurotoxin BMAA on *Daphnia magna*, a water flea. In his personal workspace, Lamichhane can work without a mask – but, all the same, COVID considerations have sent his research in a new direction.

COVID Can't Stop SNC's Undergraduate Research Forum

Like all scholarly researchers, students participating in this year's **Undergraduate Research Forum** have faced once-in-a-lifetime challenges as they advanced their projects. Yet COVID constraints haven't dampened students' enthusiasm for the event, nor affected the quality of their research. In fact, they've sparked their ingenuity.

Getting outside, thinking outside the box

Take Bryanna Fogel '21. The political science major tackled a research project regarding equitable park access in the village of Bellevue, Wis. The project stemmed from her internship with Bellevue's parks, recreation and forestry department, where she was helping update the village's comprehensive outdoor recreation plan. While combing through results of a community survey about what residents would like to see in their local parks, she came across feedback regarding the difficulty some residents had in getting to a local park. So Fogel decided to dive into the issue of accessibility.

"Accessibility is more than, 'Do you have a park?'" she says. "Do you have a park that's safe, that you can realistically get to without a car, that has what you need to play?"

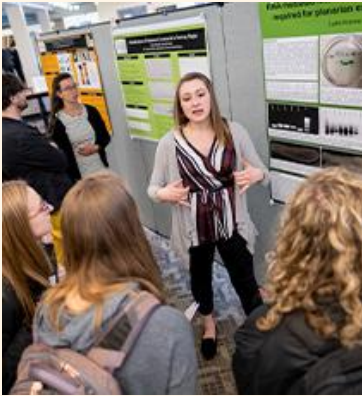
Fogel began researching park service areas, the safety of street crossings and park quality. Did a park meet ADA accessibility codes, was the playground up to date with the current safety codes, would residents prefer more green space or basketball courts? Although she's been able to go into the village offices to work, COVID-19 restrictions made it more difficult to get in touch with residents. And community input is critical for future development.

"Normally, we'd have town-hall meetings to get feedback and talk directly with residents," she says. Instead, she's relied on virtual platforms like Zoom, Facebook and emailed surveys. Now, she's readying a presentation on her topic for the Undergraduate Research Forum, along with presentations to village officials and others.

Fogel says working on this particular project during a pandemic, when people have been heading outside in record numbers, taught her another lesson: the value of outdoor recreational space. "Very few parks and rec agencies in the nation can meet the needs of every resident," she says. "But COVID stressed the necessity of why every agency should make sure we have equitable access to parks."

Surveying the field – from a new vantage point

For Carrie Kissman (Biology), summer means field research with her students, namely collecting water samples from the Fox River and various lakes. During the school year, these samples are then processed in her lab. That was the plan last summer for her collaboration with Subash Lamichhane '21. (Lamichhane, who received the Mark Stinski Award in 2020-2021, was the Mark Stinski Research Fellow for the summer of 2020.) Lamichhane, long interested in neuroscience, wanted to run a toxicology experiment to see how the neurotoxin BMAA – produced by blooming cyanobacteria, aka blue-green algae – affects the growth, reproduction and behavior of *Daphnia magna*, a water flea. But COVID-19 quashed those plans, as all field research was cancelled.



Be Part of the Research Forum

COVID-19 is necessitating a virtual Undergraduate Research Forum this year. But that's not necessarily a negative. The benefit for parents, friends and family is that now you can join in, too! **Keep an eye on this page** for upcoming links to a forum livestream, plus poster and prerecorded presentations.

Also in This Issue

This article first appeared in the March 2021 issue of Parents of St. Norbert College. Other features in this edition included:

COVID Can't Stop SNC's Undergraduate Research Forum

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So the two quickly pivoted. Instead of field research, Kissman assigned Lamichhane to do a literature review, where he'd delve into the current research on the topic to develop a broad understanding about how the bacteria works. While Lamichhane had been pumped to run the experiment – he'd purchased the *Daphnia* last spring, the day before being notified the college was switching to remote learning for the remainder of that semester – he accepted Kissman's assignment. And in the end, he was pleased.

"The literature review was a tremendous benefit, actually," he says. "Knowledge is knowledge."

Lamichhane says the review afforded him a more in-depth understanding about his research topic. That, in turn, assisted him during his subsequent graduate school interviews; to date he's been accepted into two Ph.D. programs, including his top choice, the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. He plans to present his work at both the Undergraduate Research Forum and the Ecological Society of America's national meeting in August.

Kissman says that, while it goes without saying that there are many negatives to living through a pandemic, one positive is that it's instilling resilience and grit in SNC students, qualities which will be invaluable in their future endeavors. "Everybody is struggling," she says, "but I'm seeing so many students say, 'I'm not going to let this hold me back. I'll just find another way.' "

*The annual **Undergraduate Research Forum** highlights students' research projects – often undertaken in collaboration with their professors – via oral presentations, poster displays and artistic performances. This school year, the forum – coming April 26-30 – will be virtual instead of in person.*

March 19, 2021

Since this article was first published, Subash Lamichhane has graduated and is now attending the School for Neuroscience at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus as a graduate student. He was profiled in SNC's Great Starts series focusing on successful new grads. Read his profile [here](#). (Oct. 21, 2021)

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