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By Jordana Tusman
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Last Thursday, April 15, the Baccalaureate Honors Program (BHP) hosted its first annual Poetry Slam and Splat.

Organized and emceed by Sociology Professor Dr. James Dickinson, the spat was open to anyone who wanted to participate, the purpose being to provide a forum for students, faculty and staff to recite a favorite or original poem.

“It was great fun being the emcee, as I got to not only run the show and warm things up reading a poem or two, but also enter my own, feeble composition in one of the categories of the competition,” said Dickinson.

The slam lasted from 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the University Gallery and had an assortment of categories including Best Shortest Poem, Best Symbolist Poem (aka Most Obfuscate Poem) and Best Celebrating Science Poem.

“I heard about the event from Professor Netzley in a flyer he handed out to our class, and also from Professor Maynard who encouraged me to attend the event,” said junior Andre Middleton.

As approximately 30 people took their seats in the audience, or helped themselves to a delicious arrangement of refreshments provided by Mary O’Conor of the ARAMARK catering service, others were busy signing up to enter their poems into the slam.

“The piece I chose to recite was a piece I had written entitled ‘Soul Friends,’ “ said freshman Lea Chappell.

“Although I was apprehensive to read something I had written, my best friend, Becky Foulks, inspired me to recite my poem. However, Dr. Maynard was the one who inspired me to participate in the poetry slam itself.”

Before entrants presented their poems, Dickinson announced the entrants’ names, the poem they were to recite and the category they had entered.

“I was inspired to compose ‘Knowledge of You’ by the various relationships I have with people and my attempt to understand them, to ultimately understand my self better,” said Middleton. While some entrants like Middleton chose to recite serious poetry, others like junior Drew Novelli, decided to take a more humorous approach. He entered his poem into the category of Best Poem Adapted From A Novel.

“The name of my piece was ‘Ice Ice Baby,’ “ said Novelli. “I guess my love of late 80’s / early 90’s rap inspired me to pick this piece. Additionally, I just thought it would be funny.

The slam winners were determined by four qualified judges: professor of philosophy and director of BHP, Dr. Carol Nicholson, professor of English, Dr. Judith Johnston, professor of political science, Dr. Frank Racusino, and professor of English, Dr. Katherine Maynard.

“This was the first BHP Colloquium for me as the new BHP Director, and so I was really looking forward to it,” Nicholson said. “I especially appreciated the seriousness of the students’ efforts and the fact that quite a few faculty members got into the spirit of things. It was good to see President Rozanski, Provost Frakt and Associate Provost Castagnera there."

Altogether, there were 14 people who presented poems, all of whom had the option of using a podium and a microphone.

“It was the first time I’ve ever been to a poetry slam so it was a new experience for me,” said freshman Allison Alter. “My English Professor, Dr. Goldie, encouraged me to attend, and I’m glad I did. I had a pleasant time."

“I liked it a lot,” said freshman Jamie Bongiorno. “I thought it was put together very nicely. People came prepared. They were talented. I particularly enjoyed Andre Middleton’s piece, ‘Family Ties.’ It was touching. I almost started to cry.”

Besides the reading of poetry, there was even a special singing rendition by Professor Emeritus of History, Dr. Charles Richardson, whose version of a Rider fight song was placed under the category of Rider, Mon Amour.

How did the contestants think they did?

“I thought all the poets were great,” said Novelli. “There was some very inspirational and original work displayed.”

“I thought that everyone who participated that night was fantastic,” said Chappell. “It is difficult enough to stand up in front of an audience and speak, but to stand up in front of an audience and recite poetry, especially something you’ve written, adds a whole new level of meaning to the word difficult.”

Even though the entrants were excited to share their poems, others, agreed with Chappell that their nerves kicked in a little at the podium.

“I love reading and writing, especially when it comes to poetry, so I was very excited when I learned of this event," said freshman Rebecca Foulks. "I was extremely nervous though, and my friend Lea had to convince me to read aloud. We helped each other through our fears."

However, the nerves were not a big problem because the entrants did a fine job.

“I think everyone did a spectacular job that evening. It was a nice experience to hear poetry from a wide array of various personalities," said Foulks. After all 14 people recited their poems, their prizes were given to the best of the best in each category. Entrants included Andre Middleton for Cleverest Rap Lyric, Ken Levin for Best Shortest Poem, Lea Chappell for Finest Philosophical Couplet, Colleen Dillon for Best Dressed Poem, Drew Novelli for Best Poem From An Adapted Novel, Certificate of Merit to Rebecca Foulks.

"The BHP is all about providing intellectually challenging experiences that are fun," said Nicholson. "We’re looking forward to sponsoring more events to which the whole campus community will be invited."