Iowa Center for Research by Undergraduates

Thoughts on Titles and Abstracts for FURF/SURF

You can always bump up the technical talk. The hard part about presenting research and scholarly work is talking to general audiences about what you do and why it matters – this is especially true when you are presenting at ICRU events, where people are from all different disciplines, majors, and backgrounds.

Remember, this is not a conference in your field, so it is okay to not be so technical here (unless you are using a poster from another conference, that’s fine. Just revise your talking points and title/abstract for the SURF program!)

A few things that can help...

1. **A catchy title!!** Believe me when I say that people will walk right by your poster if the title is long and complicated, making it seem that is isn’t interesting or relevant or it is too hard to understand. Think about the type of event this is...when you submit your title (and abstract) for SURF – consider making your title (and abstract) catchier/more simple – even if you only use that wording for this event!

   o Consider these titles:
     - Using Geographic Information Systems to Map Teen Driving Errors
     - Good things come in small packages: Fruit fly models of muscle and heart disease
     - The Favorite Word Project
     - A Historical Perspective on Humanitarianism in Action: Witnessing and Responsibility in Doctors Without Borders
     - Searching for a Novel Weight Loss Treatment
     - Engineering an Electric Car

   o Versus these titles:
     - Investigating if Utrophin-GFP can be used to examine actin remodeling during Drosophila oogenesis
     - Magnetic Behavior of Nanostructured Mn0.23TaS2 Near Ferromagnetic Transition
     - Understanding the Basis of Antibiotic Tolerance in Bacteria by Use of a Nematode (Caenorhabditis elegans) Model - (this one is almost good!)
     - Racial Stress, Acculturation, and Social Support for Latino/as in PanHellenic Organizations Within Predominantly European American Collegiate Institutions

   o You want people to walk by and stop to talk with you! Long, scientific titles are great and sound impressive, but they can also be too intimidating for people who aren’t fellow biologist, or engineers, or anthropologists, or musicians!
2. A readable abstract!! Again, we know that you know what you’re talking about. But in a general audience presentation setting, people want to at least have a basic idea of what you’re doing. A readable abstract helps!

   o Do something like this:
     - Born Too Early: Studying Blood Volume in Extremely Premature Babies
       - Studying disease and treatment of anemia in extremely premature infants can be facilitated by knowing the blood volume. This is clinically important because many drugs are dosed (given) based on the volume of blood in an infant, and for babies that are extremely premature we now have a way to accurately determine their blood volume without using more than a drop of blood. These blood samples are available without even having to draw extra blood from the infant because the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit regularly runs blood tests on the infants that leave a little blood leftover in the tube, which can be used in this study.

   o Don’t do something like this:
     - Comparison of multiple red cell volume methods performed concurrently in premature infants following allogeneic transfusion.
       - Using biotinylation, hemoglobin f va a, or minor antigen assays, we can model the volume of a preterm infant’s blood based on the dilution principle (before and after transfusion). We also use biotinylated cells in tracking studies to compare cell survival of adult donor and infant blood within the infant, correcting for phlebotomy, additional transfusions, or other events that would affect the appearance of biotin in flow cytometry. The assays can be performed at volumes of around 10uL of blood.

3. A memorable “elevator speech” version of your research!!

   o What are the one or two KEY points that you want to make sure your poster visitor will walk away remembering?

   o Consider touching on the following:
     - What is the intriguing puzzle/question that inspires you to do what you’re doing?
     - What have you discovered or concluded (or hope to)?
     - Why is what you do interesting/important/exciting?
     - Why should the person who is talking to you care?

   o The best short description of your work can let the person walk away knowing/remembering something and/or give them the chance to ask follow up questions if they want to.

4. Act the part!!

   o You’re a researcher/scholar who should be excited about what they do!

   o Eye contact is important

   o Look pleased to talk about your work and make the change in your posture accordingly (stand up straight)!

   o Sound interested in your work (so often this isn’t the case), because excitement is contagious (and make you memorable)!

   o Sound like a potential colleague – yes, you’re student, but you’ve accomplished some great things already!