

18 November 2014
C133/2014

Curtin PhD student crowned Three Minute Thesis champion

--- Winner tops 47 rivals in Trans-Tasman Final ---

Curtin University PhD student Sarah Marley has been crowned 2014 Three Minute Thesis (3MT) champion at the Trans-Tasman final in Perth.

The annual research communication competition challenges higher degree students by giving them just three minutes to deliver a compelling presentation on their thesis and its significance to a non-specialist audience.

The competition is held in two stages with participating universities holding their own heats and finals in September and October, and the winners advancing to compete in the Trans-Tasman Final in November.

Ms Marley, a first-year PhD student with the Centre for Marine Science and Technology at Curtin, won the event ahead of 47 other contestants from across Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

Her thesis, "Behavioural and Acoustic Responses of Coastal Dolphins to Noisy Environments", investigates how coastal dolphins are responding to increasing levels of man-made noise in the ocean, which threatens to mask their means of communication.

Ms Marley said the 3MT competition had given her an excellent opportunity to share her fascination of the marine environment with other people.

"I think all scientists are excited by the opportunity to share their research, and it's certainly a topic I enjoy talking about. I have worked with marine mammals for several years, but have only recently branched into marine acoustics. It is fascinating to investigate the marine environment in the same way that whales and dolphins do – by sound, as well as vision.

"Winning the 3MT also marks a personal milestone as I used to struggle with public speaking. Four years ago, I couldn't even present my research to a small group of friends without getting embarrassed and reading word-for-word from a script. So to now enjoy presenting to this degree is something I am both amazed at and extremely proud of."

Ms Marley said she is a firm believer in science communication, as there is no point doing research if no-one is going to be told about it.

"Previously there has been a strong focus on presenting research academically, through conference talks and journal articles. But it is just as important to communicate research to the general public."

"Events like 3MT are an important way of not only training young researchers in important communication skills, but making it fun to do so," Ms Marley said.

Ms Marley's research supervisor, Dr Chandra Salgado Kent, said her student's passion for her subject matter contributed to her achievement.

“Sarah has immersed herself in this interesting and fascinating research and this shone through in her presentation. I am certain that this achievement will see her put even more energy into her work and ensure a great outcome in the end,” Dr Salgado Kent said.

The inaugural 3MT competition was held at The University of Queensland (UQ) in 2008, with 160 higher degree students competing.

The concept was adopted by other Australian and New Zealand universities in 2009 and 2010, leading to the development of a multi-national event, and the staging of the inaugural Trans-Tasman 3MT competition in 2010.

Since 2011 the popularity of the competition has increased and 3MT competitions are now held in at least 170 universities across more than 17 countries worldwide.

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