

Say It Again—This Time to the Camera

Graduate students adapt 3-minute thesis presentations to online format

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IN YEARS PAST, THIS IS WHAT THE 3MT COMPETITION WOULD HAVE LOOKED LIKE. THIS YEAR, THE EVENT WAS HELD ONLINE.

The University of New Hampshire's fifth annual [Three Minute Thesis \(3MT\)](#) competition was Monday, April 27 via Zoom. While traditionally this event has been an in-person, multi-round series, the UNH campus closure this spring led the Graduate School to adapt it to a single-round virtual event.

This was no small feat. As Dean of the Graduate School Cari Moorhead emphasized in her opening speech, digitizing the 3MT required on-the-spot learning from both the event organizers and participants.

And the event was quite the success—audience members from around the world, totaling 157 attendees, gathered live via Zoom to watch 20 pre-recorded presentations from all different disciplines, and then deliberate on winners.

Eight esteemed judges chose the top three winners—Jordan Pierce (first place), Allison Giannotti (second place) and Isaiah Lee (third place). Audience members chose Danial Mirzaiyanrajuh as this year's People's Choice recipient, with Kerry Dykens as the runner-up. More information about and links to their presentations can be found at the bottom of this story.

This year's judges included UNH President James Dean; Director of STEAM Ahead NH Bob Baines; Lecturer in the UNH Department of Mechanical Engineering Ivo Nedyalkov; UNH Director of Research Integrity Services Julie Simpson; NH State Representative Patricia Lovejoy; USNH Board Trustee and Sight Line Public Affairs President Jamie Burnett; Director of Human Resources for Unitil Corp. Tonya Rochette; and Mike Maloney, Vice President of Data and Innovation at RiverStone.

This year's competition was sponsored by [RiverStone Group](#), a New Hampshire-based insurance solutions company. Thanks to RiverStone's generosity, each participant was awarded a minimum prize of \$100.

"Regardless of where they come in today, we are honoring and respecting the hard work of all of our participants," Dean Moorhead said. "This is really not about the competition, it's about the learning."

The goal of the 3MT is for students to explain their research to a general audience in three minutes or less—a skill that will serve every participant throughout their careers, said President Dean.

"Whether you win or not today, really everybody benefited from this. You could just see the caliber of communication and thoughtfulness about these presentations in only 3 minutes—it's extraordinary," President Dean said. "I've spent my whole career in academics, and I've listened to hundreds if not thousands of talks, and yours are better than most, already at your young stage."

Lovejoy and Burnett both remarked that they came away from this event wanting to know more about each topic—a clear indication of each participant's success in effectively presenting their work.

The judges were also impressed by how each student rose to the challenge of adapting their work to a virtual format. "The fact that you do this on top of everything else that

you're doing, particularly given the difficult circumstances, says a lot about you as individuals and about your dedication to your research and education in general," Burnett said.

For third-place winner Lee and People's Choice runner-up Dykens, the challenge of the 3MT was in showing relationships that are typically invisible to the naked eye. For Lee, this meant drawing examples from personal relationships to illustrate what happens between bacteria. For Dykens, who researches marine microbial life, she situated microbes as the potential key to big questions, including climate change and life on other planets.

Giannotti, who has competed in the 3MT three years in a row, described the challenge as both honoring the complexity of one's research while also making it accessible. "I've learned to emerge from the weeds of my research, and illustrate the larger landscape on which it sits, which is extremely beneficial for things like clearly articulating my work to a hiring committee," Giannotti said.

Each presenter had essential tricks in the process, most of which were learned during the Graduate School's 3MT workshop series. For Dykens, free-writing and sharing versions of her presentation with family allowed her to make a compelling pitch. For Pierce, memorizing a script allowed him to relax into the presentation.

"This competition isn't about summarizing your entire thesis in 3 minutes, it's about showcasing to the world your passion for what you study," Pierce said. "If you're ever provided with the opportunity to share your discoveries, do it, because you might change the world in the process."

2020 3MT Winning Presentations

- Jordan Pierce "[Automating the Boring Stuff: Using A.I. to Map Coral Reefs](#)" (1st place; MS Oceanography Student)
 - Allison Giannotti "[Becoming Scientists: Students' Literacy Activities in Science Education](#)" (2nd place; PhD Candidate in Composition & Rhetoric)
 - Isaiah Lee "[Infective Heredity and Infectious Bacteria in Hospitals](#)" (3rd place; PhD Molecular & Evolutionary Systems Biology Student)
 - Danial Mirzaiyanrajeh "[Exploration of Performance-based Specifications \(PBSs\) for Innovative Asphalt Mixtures](#)" (People's Choice Winner; PhD Civil & Environmental Engineering Student)
 - Kerry Dykens "[Mighty Marine Microbes](#)" (People's Choice Runner-up; MS Oceanography Student)
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