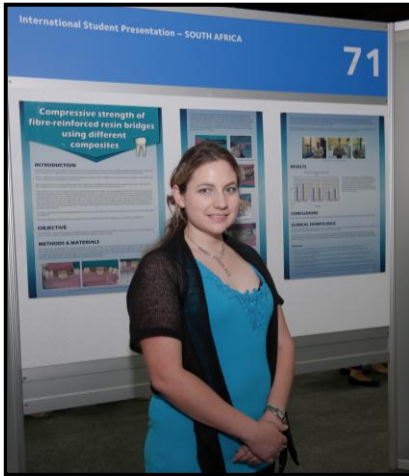




## SCADA 2011: A Student's Experience



*Denise Lancaster, a 2011 SCADA participant from the University of Pretoria in South Africa, shares her recent experience in Las Vegas at the annual DENTSPLY/ADA Student Clinician Research program.*

First, I would like to say what a tremendous surprise and honour it was to be given the opportunity to go to Las Vegas to present my project at the American Dental Association Annual Session. I would like to thank DENTSPLY for allowing me to partake in this amazing adventure and for sponsoring my flights, accommodation and spending money. I would also like to particularly thank Sharon Fisher, whose willing and quick assistance made the organising of my trip much easier. A big thank you must also go to Professor de Wet (Head of Odontology – University of Pretoria), Professor


Dannheimer and Dr. Roussow of the University of Pretoria's Oral and Dental Hospital, without whom the research project would never have reached the heights that it did.

I left OR Tambo International Airport on Thursday, October 6, 2011 as a rather anxious first-time international traveler and returned on Thursday, October 13 a rather tired, but different dental student. The entire experience was very well-organised and went on without a single hitch – something which tends to happen when the organizers are fluent in excellence.

All my flights were punctual and my luggage was never lost, something about which I was ecstatic. The stop-overs at Washington and San Francisco en route to Las Vegas, and San Francisco and New York en route to Johannesburg, were quiet and involved a great deal of walking around in order to dispel flight fatigue, as well as the perusing of various Las Vegas guide books. My neighbours on my flights were all pretty friendly and able to answer my numerous questions about America.

On arrival at the Las Vegas airport - just before midnight on Friday - I was greeted by slot machines and an airport so large that I had to board a train in order to fetch my luggage. It was fantastic to be met by a friendly chauffer at the airport (holding a signboard with my name on it, something which seems to impress my friends no end); he chatted with me about great things to do in Vegas and then dropped me off at the gorgeous Mandalay Bay hotel, which lies at the southern end of the Vegas Strip. The hotel has truly amazing architecture and the splendor takes some time to absorb. The foyer alone is one great expanse of exquisite interior design. I was placed in a very spacious and elegant room, which I occupied for the next four nights.

On Saturday morning I looked out my window at the man-made beach that is an icon of Mandalay Bay, and which reminded me a little of Sun City's Valley of the Waves. I proceeded to wander around the expansive hotel which houses numerous restaurants, gambling rooms, shops, an aquarium and convention centre. I booked two shows in the morning (Cirque du Soleil's Mystere and David Copperfield). By that time the aquarium was open, so I spent a bit of time strolling through it, admiring the piranhas (which apparently cause the death of precisely "0 number of people per year"), Komodo dragon, swordfish and numerous underwater life. The stingray petting pool was duly visited and the stingrays touched (rather dubiously, it must be said). I still find the concept of an aquarium in a hotel to be a very unique and impressive one, and bought a deceptively-soft shark plush toy to remind me of it.



The time between visiting the aquarium and watching *Mystere* was spent wandering up and down the Vegas Strip (a 12-mile expanse of road that is lined by all the hotels and shopping centres which make Vegas so famous). It is relatively safe to walk along it alone, although there is a bus system. I found walking a better experience as one can then stop and take photos, admire the architecture and various interesting forms of human life. One can also walk into the hotels and gasp at how amazing (or, in some cases, extremely gaudy) the buildings are, and walk around the numerous shopping complexes. The weather was excellent during my entire stay in Vegas; it was warm enough to walk around without a jacket, and cool enough to amble around comfortably during the heat of the day.

Saturday night was spent watching *Mystere*, a remarkable show that combines humour and spectacular acts of gymnastics, which I thoroughly enjoyed. After *Mystere* I headed to the MGM Grand hotel to watch David Copperfield live. I was placed near the stage with a friendly traveling band from Nashville, who helped to make the show even more interesting.


On Sunday morning, SCADA (Student Clinicians of the American Dental Association) hosted an International Students Breakfast at the convention centre in Mandalay Bay, which was my first opportunity to meet the SCADA members and Mrs. Tammy Roland from DENTSPLY, who took very good care of us and quickly and efficiently sorted out any problems that arose. It was also an excellent way to meet the other international students from the UK, Australia, Germany, Taiwan, Turkey and numerous other countries. A brief introduction to the event was given by Mrs. Roland and Dr. Leo Rouse, president of SCADA; the speeches helped us to feel special and more at home.

Sunday afternoon was spent visiting the rest of the Strip before the official opening of the SCADA research program that evening, where Dr. Linda C. Niessen, Chief Clinical Officer of DENTSPLY, Dr. Leo Rouse and other dignitaries delivered opening speeches that made me feel extremely blessed to be present, and also gave us the basic outline of the presentation setup for the next day. Once the speeches had been given and the delectable supper consumed, the evening was spent socializing with the international and American students.

Monday morning was spent walking around the extensive ADA exhibition and chatting to the various company representatives about their products. Most of the reps were great to talk to, and a few had even been to South Africa on previous excursions.

The American students presented their posters on Monday morning for judging, and the international students were to present their posters from 1 p.m. onwards. I duly put up my poster and enjoyed presenting it to the other students who passed by, as well as a few dentists who came to view the projects. There was time to chat to the other students about their research, which ranged from practical, hands-on experiments to more scientifically-orientated experiments, which were often a reflection of their undergrad degrees. It was good to observe the various techniques in which the various nationalities presented their research. At the awards ceremony (which happened later), it was said that the way in which the student presented his or her project could often make or break the way in which they were received by the judges; I found this to be true. A simple project, presented by a competent student who was enthusiastic about their work, could become much more interesting than a complex project presented by a bored student.

The reception and awards ceremony for the American SCADA winners happened on Monday evening, after a brief practice session. Dr. Niessen and Dr. Rouse opened the ceremony with very encouraging speeches. The international students were acknowledged by being called onto stage while our names, countries, universities represented and project topics were announced. The American students were called up onto the stage in the same manner, after which the



(exceedingly happy) winners were announced. Other awards were given to members of SCADA. After the buffet that followed the ceremony, a few of the students headed to the live band area for a final get-together, after which farewells were exchanged, as well as means of keeping in contact.

I was completely blown away by my entire Vegas experience and I enjoyed every minute of it immensely! I believe that I grew tremendously as a person in terms of confidence and experience, and as a dentist in terms of professionalism and my way of thinking. Once again, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to DENTSPLY, as well as to everyone involved.

*Denise Lancaster*