

Science Fair – Facts and Myths
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I thank Niagara Hindu Samaj for letting me write this article in this year's issue of *Deepmala*. My article is targeted to a young audience and their parents to find out more about an endless future in the prodigious field of science.

Science Fairs are generally a competition where students display their research on science topics in a visually appealing presentation. Most projects are about day-to-day science topics we see in the news. These topics spark a question, which is then answered using an Experimental Design. Niagara Students in grades 5-12 start off by competing in their school's science fair, where the top projects are selected and forwarded to the Niagara Regional Science and Engineering Fair (NRSEF). The NRSEF, which is usually held at Brock University in the last weekend of March, features approximately 200 of Niagara's top young scientists competing for several awards at the Juvenile (Gr.5 & 6), Junior (Gr.7 & 8), Intermediate (Gr. 9&10) and Senior (Gr. 11 & 12) levels. From the Niagara Science fair about 5 projects (number varies depending on year) from grades 7-12 are sent to the Canada Wide Science Fair (CWSF), which is held in various locations across Canada in mid- May.

My experiences at both the regional and national level science fairs were amazing. At the regional level, I made friends with students from other schools in Niagara. We also had fun during the robotics and video editing workshops.

The CWSF is a completely different, but wonderful experience. I made friends with many like-minded youth from across the country during the "Finalist's Lounge" time we had or during pin-trading. We also got to visit local attractions near or in the host city. In Peterborough, I went cave spelunking and visited a native carving. By our early wake-ups, dorms and different meals, I got a feel of how university life will be like. During judging and public viewing, I also got to interact with experts in various fields of science and elder students.

If your school currently does not have a school science fair program, you can still participate in the NRSEF. From the Niagara Hindu Samaj, Neha Gulati and I participated in the NRSEF, even though our schools did not. If you are interested in competing [or after you have completed a project], visit www.niagarasciencefair.org and click on "How Do I?" There you will find a step-by-step guide on how to register for the Niagara Regional Science Fair.

Even if you are not from the Niagara Region, you still can participate in the science fair program. First ask the science teachers in your school if your school has a science fair.

If not, visit <http://apps.yfs-fsj.ca/fairlocator/> to find your closest regional science fair (Canada).

If you live in the US, go to http://apps.societyforscience.org/find_a_fair/ to find your closest regional fair.

There are many myths tied to science fairs. One is that you need to complete your project in a fancy, million dollar lab to participate. Many elementary-level, prize-winning projects are "basement projects", a term that defines any project that is done from the comfort of your home. But if you would like to go above and beyond and complete a

project which needs certain non-residential equipment, try searching for professors in local universities who can provide a mentorship. YSF (Youth Science Foundation), maybe able to contact you with a mentor in your field. Visit <http://www.ysf.ca/Mentor/> to find out more about their program.

In many television shows and movies (particularly Disney Channel), it is portrayed that the winners of science fairs usually design a baking soda volcano. This is not true. In my 3 years of participating in science fairs, I have never seen a volcano in any of the 200+ projects.

By participating in science fairs, an enthusiasm for science is kindled in young scientists. Accolades and awards are a method of encouragement to continue science after school. To keep this 'Science Spark' going, I sponsored an award in memory of my grandfather named "Sikamani Memorial Award".

The Niagara Regional Science and Engineering Fair is a volunteer-run non-profit organization. Many people work day and night trying to make the Niagara Science Fair run smoothly. But with the 50th year coming up in 2012, they require more support. Every year, they require people with various science backgrounds to come judge the 200+ projects. The NRSEF committee also requires monetary donations to forward more students to the Canada Wide Science Fair. A couple of donations could send one more kid to the CWSF. Participating in the national level could completely change a student's outlook on science. They might even be future Nobel Prize winner. I request your kind donations for NRSEF (tax receipts will be provided) to have an endless future in many kid's scientific ideas. Your donations will trickle down to long way in the field of science!

With all the technology we have today, ideas are easy to find. By watching T.V., one of today's global issues could spark a topic in your head. If you search "Science Fair Projects" in Google, you will get many ideas which you can tweak to create your project.

If you have an idea but would like some guidance on how to approach it, feel free to e-mail me at swimmingpianist96@hotmail.com. I will gladly help you. By Participating in the science fairs, there are numerous opportunities to earn many awards with cash prizes and scholarships. Imagine going to University without paying a single penny!