

How it all went down

On March 8th WAX attended the French final of Famelab, a science popularization competition. There 10 students or researchers working in France competed for a spot to compete at the international final the beginning of June in London. The challenge: explain a scientific subject to the general public in 3 minutes or less...no easy task.

You can watch a replay of the whole event here.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oWIEr_nntf4

The event took place at the Cité Universitaire Internationale de Paris in the Maison Internationale's lavish Salle Honorat.



The Salle Honorat with its gold ceiling.



Everyone got stickers and pins!

Contestants had 3 minutes to give a short speech about a subject of their choice. Subjects from the night were as diverse as stem cells, chemiluminescence, the physics of nanospheres,

the scientific method, and even the history of life on Earth. The approaches contestants used were as diverse as the subjects they chose. Some contestants used props to better convey their ideas, others not. Several chose a humorous style while others a more serious tone. Each presentation was followed by a short question session from the panel of judges.

After all the speeches, the competitors showed their ability to respond to questions from non-experts. While the jury left to deliberate, the audience was invited to write their questions down on pieces of paper. The questions were grouped together by topic and the competitors were invited back onto the stage to respond to the questions they were asked.

All throughout the night, a live drawing session was taking place behind the scenes, with artists inspiring themselves from the atmosphere and the competitors' talks.



One of my favorite drawings from the night.

Science communication is more than just a speech

The evening was a good mix of science and comedy, a bit like a scientific stand-up show. However, I don't think Famelab succeeds entirely in its goal of recognizing good science communicators. Science communication is not only about your ability to present a prepared speech to an audience of non-experts, but also to be able to identify the misunderstandings of your audience and address them with clear explanations on the spot; to connect with your audience, and discover new ways to convey the same meaning. Unfortunately, because of the informal format of the question and answer session, Famelab fails to test the contestants' skill in this area.

Oftentimes the questions from the panel were personal questions such as: "How did you prepare for the evening?" "Do you explain science often to non-scientists?" "Why did you choose this subject?" Other times the questions simply aimed to get a laugh out of the audience. "I was wondering, how do you effectively hide a dead body?" "So we agree that humans landing on the Moon is just a conspiracy theory, right?" Humor obviously has its place in the event, but the question and answer session was simply not the place.

As a whole however, Famelab is an awesome movement to make science understandable for everyone, exactly like what we try to do at WAX. We are looking forward to tuning in to the

final this summer! And for any wapitis that happen to be in London at the time, definitely consider attending the international final at the Cheltenham Festival (<http://www.cheltenhamfestivals.com/science/whats-on/grid>) on June 7th.