

URCA

Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities

Volume 3, Issue 1

Fall 2011



Above: Dr. Walton and Shaun Diltz with two recovering turtles

Right: Zach Lawrence, Dr. Walton, Shaun Diltz, Eric Hoffman and John Markovitch each holding recovering turtles

Below: Turtle whose shell is being held together until it can heal

For More Information:

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What Is URCA?

URCA is a program designed to get undergraduate students more involved in research and creative activities. There are two ways in which students can participate in URCA: as Associates and as Assistants.

Associates: These are year-long positions in which a student designs his or her own research or creative activity project and then works with a mentor to see it through. Associates are required to attend monthly meetings and to present their scholarly work at the Spring Symposium. Associates earn a stipend and can also receive money for project-related equipment and travel. Typically 15-25 students are accepted into this program each year.

Assistants: These are semester-long positions in which students assist faculty with their research or creative activities. Assistants are not required to attend monthly meetings or present their work. Up to 100 students each semester may receive a stipend for being Assistants; however, each semester several students also participate as unpaid Assistants. It is also possible for Assistants to earn course credit for their participation.

Dr. Walton's "Turtle Whisperers"

Dr. Beth Walton and her team of undergraduate researchers work day in and day out to gather data about and help sustain some of the region's most unassuming creatures: turtles. Documentation and research on box turtles in this area is limited, but Dr. Walton and her students are working to fortify it by capturing turtles, bringing them into the lab to gather data, and tracking them once they are returned to their natural habitat. To date, they have recorded data on over 100 different turtles and work to find more every day. Not all of the turtles they find can be returned straight to their habitats, however. Many are ill or injured and need to be nursed back to health. The turtle lab on SIUE's campus becomes a "home away from home" until they recover enough to begin the process of re-acclimating to life in the wild.



Students in the lab take on a tremendous amount of work and responsibility. They also each choose a specific area of research related to the turtles to further investigate. The students reported that working in Dr. Walton's turtle lab gives them experience in the field beyond what they can learn inside a classroom, prepares them for further research endeavors and helps with the development of their senior assignment projects.

Dr. Walton shared the following about her students in her blog (<http://siueturtlesearch.blogspot.com/>):

"I can't say enough about all the students who have made this possible. They go out *each and every day*, rain or shine, **without fail** to check nearly 40 traps, check in on turtles at the Halfway House, mow the grass, process new and recaptured turtles, and assist with cleaning cages, tanks and floors in the lab, log data sheets and much, much more. The heat and humidity can be nearly intolerable. They deal with mosquitoes, ticks, chiggers, wasp stings and poison ivy. They work with integrity and compassion and a level of commitment that can't be bought with grades, stipends, or cold cash. They are working in the trenches to ensure that your children, grandchildren and great grandchildren know first-hand what a turtle is. Not simply because they've seen it in a museum or zoo, but these future generations understand how vital it is to protect biodiversity, species richness and species abundance. In all that they do every day, they never complain. They never hesitate to pitch in and cover for one another. They always rise above and complete their work. And for everything that they do, they have my deep appreciation, my admiration, and the well-deserved titles of *Turtle Heroes* and *Turtle Whisperers*."



Dr. Walton and her students - Sarjana, Lauren, Shaun*, John*, Heidi*, Ryan*, Eric*, Zach, Amanda, and Hanna - are passionate about their work, dedicated to the preservation and documentation of turtles, and willing to share their passion and knowledge with others. Keep up the good work!

* denotes student in URCA program



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Associate Brittany Zacha

Featured Associate: Brittany Zacha (Nursing)

Dr. Cindy Schmitt, Mentor

"Brittany is a senior Nursing student who demonstrates a commitment to excellence, a professional attitude, enthusiasm for learning, and a caring attitude. In addition to her excellent performance in both the classroom and clinical settings, she is involved in important affairs such as the Student Nurses Association and finds time to volunteer for such organizations as Big Brothers Big Sisters and the Special Olympics.

This year, Brittany is working to complete an URCA research project designed to investigate the perceptions of parents and children about the impact of type 1 diabetes on academic performance. Her passion for this topic is apparent in all activities related to the project and stems from her history with this condition. Brittany was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes many years ago and has several family members who also have this diagnosis. The insight she has gleaned from her experiences has been invaluable to the design of the tool and will facilitate interaction with participants. Research in this area has the potential to improve academic performance for this population of children.

There is no doubt that Brittany possesses the ability and drive to positively impact the health of others."
-Dr. Cindy Schmitt

Brittany has recently won the Nursing Clinical Excellence Award and was inducted into the Nursing Honor Society. Congratulations, Brittany!



Assistant Tonya Hatter

Featured Assistant: Tonya Hatter (Psychology)

Dr. Dan Segrist, Mentor

"My URCA Assistant is Tonya Hatter and she's doing an awesome job! She's very proactive and easily has taken a leadership role in the lab. She's also recently started talking with me about a potential study she has interest in developing - one she's clearly put a lot of time and thought into. The bottom line is that she's doing a fantastic job." -Dr. Dan Segrist





What's New with URCA?

The URCA program is happy to introduce 4 new awards! These awards will be given each semester to students and faculty in the URCA Assistant program. The awards are:

- ◆ The Vaughn Vandegrift URCA Research Mentor of the Semester Award
- ◆ The URCA Research Assistant of the Semester Award
- ◆ The URCA Creative Activities Mentor of the Semester Award
- ◆ The URCA Creative Activities Assistant of the Semester Award

Applications for these awards will be submitted to the review board and then the winners will be selected. Each winner will receive a \$100 award, a certificate, and mention on our website and possibly in an upcoming newsletter.