



Associate Andrea Gafford working on her URCA project.

# URCA

## Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities

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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 80 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.



### An Interview with Chancellor Vandegrift

URCA Associate **Rachel Holtgrave (Nursing)** recently sat down with SIUE Chancellor, **Dr. Vaughn Vandegrift**, and spoke with him regarding his views on mentoring undergraduate researchers. She learned that during his time as a faculty member he utilized undergraduates in his biochemistry laboratory as he examined waste in animal blood and recombinant DNA in plasma. He has several publications in professional journals that include students as co-authors.

**RH:** What was your favorite part of working with undergraduates in your lab?

**VV:** Watching students grow to the point that they felt comfortable presenting their work.

**RH:** What was the most challenging part of working with undergraduates in your lab?

**VV:** Making sure I had enough time to provide strong mentorship. Students need to feel a sense of purpose and understand all aspects of the process, so I had to make sure I was prepared before our meetings. Having undergraduates in my lab helped me to be a more productive professor, but at the same time, professors should understand that it is also a true time demand.

**RH:** What do you hope the undergraduate researchers in SIUE's URCA program take away from their experiences?

**VV:** I really appreciate the connections that students make with faculty members and that students can see professors as real people. I believe that students are more likely to succeed when they have those strong connections with faculty members.

**RH:** What advice would you give to undergraduate researchers?

**VV:** Hard work always pays off. Do more than what is expected and you will be rewarded for it!



Associate Rachel Holtgrave with Chancellor Vaughn Vandegrift.

#### For More Information:

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**Featured Associate: Roxane Krutsinger** (Biological Sciences: Ecology, Evolution, and Environment)

Dr. William Retzlaff, *Mentor*

“Roxane worked very hard with our St. Louis research collaborators Kelly Luckett of Green Roof Blocks and Vic Jost of Jost Greenhouses to design and implement her project on the SIUE Student Success Center. Roxane is conducting some very unique and important green roof testing. Roxane’s project is helping Kelly and Vic to evaluate several methods to improve the green roof plant performance and roof coverage. Her project is going so well, Kelly and Vic asked Roxane to add some additional evaluations to the project in mid-2010. Roxane has already presented some of the results of her work and she will present new results at the Illinois State Academy of Sciences meeting in April 2011. Further, Roxane has just been accepted into the Graduate Program in the Department of Biological Sciences at SIUE. I am fortunate that Roxane is working in my research lab!” -Dr. Retzlaff



**Featured Assistant: Jenna Wall** (Psychology)

Dr. Thad Meeks, *Mentor*

“Jenna is a motivated and bright student, and it has been a pleasure to work with her. She was very eager to learn about topics she researched in my lab. Jenna not only learned the information very quickly, she also produced many research-oriented suggestions and ideas. Last November, at the Annual Meeting of the Psychonomic Society, she was a co-author on a poster we presented based on the data collected in our lab. She attended the conference and aided in the poster presentation. To say that I am glad that she worked in my lab is an understatement. I know that Jenna plans to go on to a Ph.D. program in cognitive neuroscience and already had interviews with different programs. I have no doubt that she will succeed!” -Dr. Meeks



**Featured Project: Casie Bonham** (Nursing)

Dr. Kay Gaehle, *Mentor*

As part of her Fall 2010 Assistant work, Casie Bonham organized a Bone Marrow Registry Drive on campus this past February. Her work resulted in 202 people joining the National Bone Marrow Registry and \$665.00 being donated to DKMS America, an American Bone Marrow Donor Center! Casie used her URCA work as part of her Senior Assignment and was also selected to participate in this year’s Senior Showcase. She states, “Overall, the URCA experience has been wonderful and such a success any way you look at it!”