



# URCA NEWSLETTER

Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Program: Spring 2014 Volume 5, Issue 2

## 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: 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. Only a maximum of 10 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. Up to 80 students each semester 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.

## URCA Sustainability Projects Receive Special Funding

This semester, thanks to the generosity of Dr. Kenn Neher, Vice Chancellor of Administration, and the Sustainability Advisory Group, six additional URCA Faculty Mentors (Drs. Richard Brugam, Kelly Barry, Laurent Ahiablame, Anne Werner, Jianwei Huang, and Kristine Hildebrandt) received funding for their research projects focusing on sustainability. Two of the projects are described below.



Dr. Hildebrandt is currently working on language documentation for endangered and vulnerable languages spoken in the country of Nepal. Her URCA assistants help organize and archive data that is collected in the field so that it is available for community revitalization projects later.

Dr. Barry's research focuses on the tissue culture conservation of Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum canaliculatum*), a slow-growing native woodland plant. This plant, and others like it, is of conservation concern due to its slow growth and vulnerability to habitat change. Her URCA Assistant has been transferring tissue-culture-generated plants into The Gardens to monitor their acclimatization to the natural environment and to increase plant diversity.



## Associate Spotlight



**Kristin Dierker, Exercise Science**

**Mentor: Dr. Bryan Smith**

Congratulations to URCA Associate Kristin Dierker! She was recently accepted to Bellarmine University where she will pursue her Doctorate in Physical Therapy. Kristin says she sees herself working in an outpatient clinic, with children or athletes. Kristin's current research investigates the accuracy of 4 different physical activity-monitoring devices that are commercially available. She is comparing the daily physical activity collected (total number of steps) to the gold standard, which is the Actigraph GT3X+ Accelerometer.



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## “True Grit”

Assistants **Levi Molenhour** and **Victoria Mizel** were recently awarded a grant from the Student United Way to continue their research at the SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School with mentors Dr. Howard Ramsby and Dr. Victoria Scott. The Assistants’ research focuses on “grit,” which is defined as passion and perseverance to achieve long-term goals. The research is built around a once-a-week after school program where Levi and Victoria spend time with students to conduct experiments, write poetry, and learn all about what it means to be resilient, hard-working academically and in all other areas of life. This semester, with the help of the grant, Levi and Victoria, along with the students at the Charter School, will explore digital storytelling that will allow the students to tell their own personal grit story.



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## SIUE URCA Participants Accepted to National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR)

For the first time ever, SIUE students applied to present their research at the NCUR conference – out of 4000+ submissions, all 3 of our students were accepted!



The research project that **Brandy McAdams-Hart** will be presenting at NCUR is also her senior honors thesis. She investigated the relationship between sexual assault history and current substance abuse in women. She believes that sexual assault and substance abuse in women are two growing epidemics, and are deserving of more attention from clinicians, activists and researchers.

**Caleb Butler** is researching how African American men experience college life at a public, predominantly white institution. Caleb interviewed twenty-one African American male SIUE students. In the interviews he discussed several themes, including feelings of support, feelings of belonging and connectedness to peers, faculty, and staff, definitions of success, and personal understandings of the students’ identities as African American men.



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## URCA by the Numbers: Spring 2014

87 Funded Assistants  
68 Volunteer Assistants  
8 Funded Associates  
164 Total Student Participants  
97 Faculty Mentors  
**261 Total Participants**

A recent count indicates that URCA students have co-authored at least **266** poster presentations, **58** oral presentations, and **58** publications with their faculty mentors since 2009.