URCA

Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities

What is URCA?

URCA is a program designed to get undergraduate students 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. Only a maximum of 10 students are accepted into this very competitive program each year.

Assistants: These are semester-long positions in which students assist faculty with their research or creative activities. Approximately 90 students each semester receive stipends 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.

COVID Can’t Keep URCA Down!

Fall 2020 was a semester unlike any other, where everything, including research projects, was challenged by the global pandemic. Faculty mentors and students alike displayed ingenuity, patience and flexibility in their determination to not let COVID interrupt their scholarly work! Here are two great examples of perseverance in the face of these struggles.

Alyssa Moore (Associate)

Alyssa Moore is an URCA Associate with co-mentors, Dr. Eunyoe Ro of Psychology and Professor Shelly Goebl-Parker of Art and Design. Alyssa’s project uniquely combines her love of art and psychology. She originally aimed to create “Art Hives” on campus, physical spaces where students could participate in creating art to relax and de-stress. Her goal is to investigate the impact of these art hives on student mental health. Face to face hives became impossible this semester, however Alyssa and her mentors rallied – Alyssa will be hosting virtual art hives via Zoom where she will help people create art using everyday objects found right in their homes! It is hoped that these virtual art sessions will still be received very favorably as participants may enjoy the sense of community, connection, and distraction from everyday stressors even more during these challenging times.

Pictured: Alyssa Moore

Dr. Howard Rambsy’s Lab

Over the past two semesters leading up to Fall 2020, Dr. Howard Rambsy and his URCA Assistants have been working on an oral history project, which involves interviewing African American students about their experiences at SIUE. In those two semesters they conducted more than 200 interviews! In the past the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but they have had to move to Zoom due to COVID-19, making the process much more difficult. Where previously they could catch people in passing to speak with them, now each interview must be individually scheduled. Despite the challenges, Dr. Rambsy and his student Victoria Leffler have still been able to conduct more than 25 interviews this semester, and he believes that this semester’s interviews will serve as a specifically unique and important collection of African American student responses to the pandemic.

For More Information: http://www.siue.edu/urca, Dr. Laura Pawlow, lpawlow@siue.edu, 615-650-2608
Featured Associate: Kylea Perkins

*Mentor:* Aimee Howard-Clinger, Studio Art

URCA Associate Kylea Perkins is currently working on a project titled “The Chains That Bind Us: An Exploration of the Connections between Slavery and Hip-Hop” with her mentor, Professor Howard-Clinger. The goal of her project is to create handmade necklaces out of copper and silver chains which will explore themes of race relations. This semester, she has been hard at work building her chain-making and stone setting skills so that she can create finished necklaces. So far she has completed one rope chain necklace, and she hopes to continue honing her skills through the URCA program.

Kylea had much to say about the URCA program. She is very pleased with her time in the program so far, which has allowed her to work with new materials and gain new skills she says would otherwise have not been possible for her to achieve. She encourages other undergraduate students to consider participating in URCA, and wants to thank her mentor for her guidance and support.

**Featured Lab: Dr. Jennifer Erwin, Social Work**

*URCA Assistants: Carla Lybarger and Allison Carter*

Dr. Jennifer Erwin and her two URCA Assistants have been hard at work this semester, despite the COVID-19 pandemic forcing their research to shift focus. Originally, they wanted to examine how informal peer support plays a role in treatment courts. However, they changed plans to examine how COVID-19 has changed the way that participants interact in mental health, drug, and veterans’ courts. All court proceedings have been moved online, and Dr. Erwin believes that elements of the new online procedures may still remain useful after face-to-face proceedings return. Dr. Erwin and her students recently received IRB approval and hope to start data collection in January. Her student Assistants both expressed gratitude for being able to continue to work with Dr. Erwin this semester despite the pandemic. Carla noted that working with Dr. Erwin has helped her apply class material to the real world, and that she has gained new interest in research. Allison feels like participating in URCA has positively affected her overall academic experience by giving her a leg up in her courses and deepening her understanding of course material.

**URCA Participant Tessa Walker Honored as Lincoln Academy Student Laureate!**

The Lincoln Academy annually honors one senior from each of Illinois’ four-year, degree-granting colleges and universities for demonstrating leadership and a desire to make a difference in the world through civic engagement. Congratulations Tessa!