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.

**URCA Lab Focuses on Changes in Student Health Behaviors due to COVID**

At the beginning of the fall semester, Cameron Appelt, Madison Kennedy, Parker Kent, Mackenzie Richards and McKenna Seling were strangers with a common desire to learn more about the field of Health Psychology. Yet as this semester comes to an end, this group of five has grown into an impressive team united by their intellectual curiosity and desire to study something meaningful to their peers: how college students’ healthy and unhealthy behaviors were affected by the time course of the pandemic, specifically prior to the pandemic, during the State of Illinois shutdown, and during the re-opening.

As their mentor, I’ve been extremely impressed with how efficiently they’ve moved through the process of conceptualizing their project, study design, obtaining IRB approval, and collecting data. This group has epitomized teamwork by stepping up as their strengths and schedules dictate and ensuring that all pitch in equitably so no one gets burnt out. At our most recent meeting, they proudly reported that our data collection efforts had exceeded our intended sample size and we are excited to dive into our data analysis next spring. The team hopes to present their work at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association in April, as well as at the SIUE Scholar’s Showcase and the Psychology Department’s Expo. I couldn’t be more proud of this hard-working group!

**For More Information:** [http://www.siue.edu/urca](http://www.siue.edu/urca)

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Dr. Pawlow’s Health Psychology Lab
Featured URCA Mentor: Dr. Nicholas Guehlstorf, Environmental Sciences

Student: Emma MacNeill, URCA Associate

Dr. Nicholas Guehlstorf is a relative newcomer to the URCA program, but he has quickly become heavily involved as both an Assistant and Associate mentor. This year, he’s working with URCA Associate Emma MacNeill on a project titled “Nutrient Pollution and Water Quality: Understanding the Correlation Between Agricultural Practices and Surface Water Nutrient Pollution in Otter Lake.” Dr. Guehlstorf’s reason for joining the URCA program was because of an enthusiastic student who wanted to work with him on research: “Although I’ve been familiar with the program for years and have had colleagues with great narratives of success, the reason for my participating in both the Assistant and Associate program this past year was that I had an outstanding undergraduate student who was interested, passionate and capable to work on my proposed study.” His URCA Associate, Emma, was excited to tell us about her experience in the program: “This program has provided me with the opportunity to work with three disciplines and work in partnership with three professors, a doctoral student, and two masters students. Being part of the Associate program has strengthened my understanding of the natural and social science communities and has helped guide me towards future graduate school endeavors.”

Featured URCA Associate: Jillian Freeman

Mentor: Dr. Abdullatif Hamad, Physics

Jillian applied for the URCA Associate program on the recommendation of her mentor, Dr. Hamad. Her project is titled “Using X-Scan Pump-Probe Technique to Determine the Induced Charge in the Index of Refraction of Europium Doped Tellurite Glass.” According to Jillian, “The experience has been great, I've been able to get a more hands-on experience for what I'm interested in and I've learned a lot from Dr. Hamad about programming and optics. I think being an URCA Associate is a wonderful opportunity that has given me a lot of insight into my field of study. I would highly recommend that students who have an idea for a project or who would like to work closely with staff in their department think about becoming an URCA Associate.”

URCA Mentors Drs. Butts-Wilsmeyer & DiSalvo Co-Publish with Students

URCA Students: Samuel Rapp, Bryn Guthrie, Colleen Wagner & Andrew Tresslar

Congratulations to longtime mentors Dr. Butts-Wilsmeyer and Dr. DiSalvo for co-publishing with their students this year! Dr. Butts-Wilsmeyer and URCA Assistants Samuel Rapp and Bryn Guthrie had their work featured in Current Opinions in Environmental Science & Health while Dr. DiSalvo and URCA Associates Andrew Tresslar and Colleen Wagner had their work featured in Genes.