URCA NEWSLETTER
Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Program: Fall 2013 Volume 5, Issue 1

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 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.

Tiffany Eickhoff Recognized for Research Contributions

To say that the title of “Miss Amazing” exemplifies the extraordinary talents of senior speech communications major Tiffany Eickhoff would be an understatement. Eickhoff recently won the crown of Miss Amazing in her age division (24-27). Miss Amazing is a nonprofit organization focused on empowering young women with disabilities. Both on and off stage, Eickhoff is an inspiration to those around her. Working with her mentor, Dr. Duff Wrobbel, and assisted by Dr. Sarah VanSlette, Eickhoff helped record ‘a-day-in-the-life’ of someone with disabilities. Entitled, Enacted Assessment of Disability Support: A “Lived” Method for Assessing Student Life, the research compares how much time it takes a student with disabilities to accomplish mundane everyday tasks with how long it takes an able-bodied student to accomplish the same tasks. Tasks included getting into a campus building, getting to class, and finding a seat. “My life is all about time,” she said when talking about the research results. “We found that it takes up to three times longer for me to accomplish the same task as anyone else.” According to Dr. Wrobbel, “The basic question and manner that we addressed it actually came from Tiffany. She was...responsible for directly collecting most of our data, and key to actually doing the analysis. She identified perhaps half of the literature we reviewed...and...critiqued drafts.”

In addition to the research being accepted for publication, the team provided their information to Paul Pitts, Assistant Chancellor of Institutional Compliance “who intends to use it to look for opportunities to improve accessibility here on campus.” Eickhoff also lobbied for a handicap accessible entrance (and got it!) for the Speech Communication Department so that she could meet with her mentor, Dr. Wrobbel, in his office. The team continues to search for ways to expand their research.

Her desire to be an advocate and inspiration for people everywhere has motivated Eickhoff to eventually write an autobiography. In her future, she has numerous goals she would like to fulfill including being a world-traveler, an inspirational speaker, and ideally a public relations manager for her favorite country singer, Keith Urban. Eickhoff wanted to thank Ashley Searing and Corey Byers from the Department of Mass Communications for their assistance in the video research compilation.

URCA by the Numbers:

- Fall 2013
- 82 funded students
- 68 volunteers
- 150 total participants
Rocky Pardo Represents URCA in Chicago

Each year members of the SIUE Admissions team travel to Chicago to recruit high-achieving high school students. This year, URCA Associate Rocky Pardo was part of that recruitment effort. Rocky spoke to potential students and their parents about her experience with URCA. Rocky states, “I had a really wonderful time going up to Chicago. It really was great to be able to talk to prospective students about SIUE and URCA. There were students who really expressed interest which always makes me feel awesome as an ambassador for the school and the program.”

Caleb Butler Gaining Invaluable Experiences in Sociology

URCA Associate Caleb Butler is researching how African American men experience college life at a public, predominantly white institution (PWI). To research this topic, Caleb is interviewing twenty-one African American male SIUE students. In the interviews he is discussing several themes, including feelings of support, feelings of belonging and connectedness to peers, faculty, and staff, definitions of success, and personal understandings and definitions of the students’ identity as African American men. So far, he has completed sixteen interviews, during which he has been given the opportunity to listen to a broad range of stories and experiences. He has also gained invaluable experience in the sociological approach to qualitative interviewing. In the weeks and months to come, Caleb plans to finish and transcribe his interviews, and identify themes that emerge from the responses. These themes will help develop a theory that explains the ways African American male students navigate college at a PWI.

“URCA Worth More than Line on Resume”

URCA Assistant Brianne Harris wrote an article in the Alestle about her URCA experience. “…Joining URCA is one of the absolute best choices I have made during my college career, and I know it would be for any college student dedicated to the constant search for knowledge. Working alongside a professor on his or her project is a humbling and exciting experience… Becoming an URCA Assistant is one of the best ways to realize the changes we are capable of making in the world through our dedication to higher learning.” Find the full article at alestlelive.com keyword: URCA.

What Mentors are Saying about Their Assistants

“I have had a great pleasure working with Brad Behrendes and Drew Ruholl, my URCA assistants. They were very responsible and active in what was assigned to them during the semester and meeting their weekly goals and attending regular weekly meetings and updating me about the lab analyses a few times during each week. I found them very motivated and reliable to produce a quality product.” — Dr. Abdolreza Osouli

“Taylor Dahms and I just had a research article published in the Journal of Molecular Spectroscopy. Additionally, she will be presenting her new research at the Undergraduate Research Symposium at the American Chemical Society National Meeting in Dallas TX, in March 2014.” — Dr. Leah O’Brien