

FROM *Washington Partners - CUR's Partner in Advocacy*

It's All About Relationships

In a recent issue of the CUR Quarterly, Washington Partners—a full-service, government-relations firm in Washington, D.C., that works with CUR to promote the interests of undergraduate research with legislators and other key policy leaders—discussed the importance of CUR's members staying up to date on current developments in their states and on Capitol Hill. As a result, perhaps some of you have been reading the monthly Washington Updates that arrive in your email inbox and are generally staying abreast of happenings in Washington. “Knowledge is power” may sound trite, but indeed educating yourself is the first step to becoming an effective advocate for undergraduate research. And after knowledge comes the importance of developing helpful relationships.

President Lyndon B. Johnson said it best: “The time to make friends is before you need them.” That adage clearly applies to advocating for support from federal research programs. If you don't feel that you have the time or access to make friends with your local Representative or your two Senators, no worries. It's their staffs who counsel lawmakers on policy issues, and thus establishing a solid relationship with those staff members—nurtured before any crisis—can sometimes be more helpful than a short meeting with the elected official. The first step in building such a relationship is scheduling a meeting in the lawmaker's district office. Using the CUR Advocacy Toolkit, posted on CUR's website under the “Advocacy” tab, you can find out how to identify who represents you in the House and Senate, what Congressional committees they sit on, and see possible talking points to use during meetings with staff.

It is important during these meetings to explain what undergraduate research is, the federal funding streams that support such opportunities, and the local impact such support can have on the undergraduate researcher, the faculty mentor, the host college or university, and the country's innovation pipeline, both in the short and long term. If you are able to

take an undergraduate researcher with you to the meeting who can attest to the benefits of such an opportunity, that will make an even more powerful and lasting impression about the issue on the staff.

Setting up and attending a meeting is valuable to the cause of undergraduate research, but one meeting does not create a relationship—and, it's all about relationships. Please do not let this meeting be the last time you speak with the staff. Invite staff members to campus to see undergraduate research in action. Or invite staff members to attend your state's “undergraduate research day” at the state capitol or encourage them to urge their colleagues in Washington, D.C., to attend CUR's Posters on the Hill event. Need more ideas? Send staff members success stories, articles that highlight undergraduate research on your campus, or other key pieces of new information that support your case for public support for undergraduate research. While a daily note is not a good idea, staff members do appreciate periodic “check-ins” and updates about what is happening and good news about campus developments in the district and state.

Also, if you're ever in Washington, D.C., schedule a meeting with the staff of your Representative or one of your Senators and follow the same outline for meeting with district staff. When budgetary issues, such as the current sequestration of federal funds, become reality, it is far easier to reach out to a well-versed staffer who knows what undergraduate research is, who has met you, and who understands how your concerns affect the district and state. This is far more effective than trying to introduce yourself for the first time during a crisis. It is all about relationships, and the time to build them is now.

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