June 12, 2012

Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein
Energy and Water Development Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Feinstein:

The Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) encourages you and your colleagues to adequately invest in a number of Department of Energy (DOE) programs that support high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship as you develop your spending bill for FY 2013. Undergraduate research is an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline. The more than 600 institutions and over 7000 individuals who belong to CUR believe that the best way to capture student interest and create enthusiasm for a discipline is through research in close collaboration with faculty members.

The attention being paid to science and research at the federal level reflects its importance. Federal investments in undergraduate research are vital to the future, and have a profound impact on local communities across America. The country’s priorities—developing clean, renewable energy sources, establishing a “green” economy, supporting research and discovery to fight disease and improve the country’s health care system—are supported by undergraduate research. Federal spending priorities should recognize the endeavor’s important role in pursuing these national goals. As the largest federal supporter of basic physical sciences research, which is conducted primarily at universities, the DOE plays a vital role in advancing the national, economic, and energy security and competitiveness of the U.S.

The DOE Office of Science plays an instrumental role in supporting undergraduate research. Programs like the Visiting Faculty Program (formerly known as Faculty and Student Teams (FaST) program) provide STEM students and faculty unique and meaningful research opportunities with world-recognized scientists. This research produced by the Visiting Faculty Program also provides the Department of Energy’s National Laboratories an extraordinary amount of valuable information on science and new technologies. This program actually received a welcomed increase in FY2012 and we thank you for this. In FY2013 we urge you and your colleagues to support funding for this program at FY2012 levels at minimum.

Included within the Office of Science, the Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists (WDTS) program supports a range of opportunities for the Nation's science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (STEM) students and educators. In addition to providing significant professional development experiences to K-12 teachers and undergraduate STEM faculty, WDTS also supports programs that provide undergraduate students world class research opportunities at the National Laboratories. The
experiences provided by WDTS inspire students to pursue STEM fields of study and aim to increase the pipeline of skilled scientists and engineers who can successfully pursue careers in areas that will support the development of a sustainable, clean energy future; support our national security; and contribute to U.S. scientific discovery and innovation. This program sustained a cut in FY2012 of $4 million, and we strongly encourage you and your colleagues to support this program and maintain current FY2012 funding levels of $18.5 million.

Continued investments in the progress and promise of U.S. competitiveness and innovation are crucial, and these DOE programs support high-quality research opportunities at the undergraduate level. Thank you for your attention to these views. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 202.783.4810 ext. 201 or eambos@cur.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth L. Ambos
Executive Officer

Cc: Members of the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee