



Council on Undergraduate Research  
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Presidential Transition Team  
Washington, DC

Dear Transition Team Representative:

On behalf of the Council on Undergraduate Research, congratulations to President-elect Obama and those who worked so hard on his campaign. As you prepare to ease the change in presidency in the New Year, I am pleased to submit a number of recommendations to the Presidential Transition Team that are relevant to the development of the new Administration's **education** and **competitiveness** agendas.

The Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) supports faculty development for high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship. Nearly 600 institutions and 3000 individuals belong to CUR. CUR believes that the best way to capture student interest and create enthusiasm for a discipline is through research in close collaboration with faculty members. Undergraduate research is an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline.

As the Democratic Party so accurately asserts in this year's Platform, "Our institutions of higher education are also the economic engines of today and tomorrow." CUR resoundingly agrees with that statement, and has documented evidence of the benefits of undergraduate research. Undergraduate research develops critical thinking, creativity, problem solving and intellectual independence. It develops an understanding of research methodology and promotes an innovation-oriented culture, while increasing retention in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) pipeline.

CUR is pleased that President-elect Obama has been vocal on the need for the U.S. to compete more effectively against international rivals, and sees federal investments in STEM education and basic and applied research as prudent ones. Undergraduate research enhances student learning with faculty mentoring relationships and is the very type of learning experience that leads some students to pursue previously unplanned graduate and doctoral study in the very fields that are crucial to maintaining the country's competitiveness. The work also contributes significantly to the research enterprise.

The federal investment in undergraduate research becomes more vital to the future of America every day. Federally funded grants for undergraduate research also have far-reaching effects on participating institutions.

CUR joins the call for funding programs authorized by the America COMPETES Act, which make improvements to federal math and science education initiatives and a strong commitment to research. While these programs won overwhelming support from both the House and Senate last year, the funding did not materialize. Real dollars should follow last year's strong endorsement.

In addition, there are a number of federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, the Department of Energy, the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities, and others that support varied research and education programs as independent grant-making agencies.

- At the National Science Foundation, there are a number of discrete, as well as cross-directorate efforts that support undergraduate research:
  - The Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Improvement (CCLI) program funds research on undergraduate STEM teaching and learning. This program is funded under the Education and Human Resources Directorate's Division of Undergraduate Research.
  - The Chemistry Division's Undergraduate Research Collaborative (URC) program is designed to expand the reach and diversity of undergraduate research to first- and second-year college students.
  - Through indirect funding, the Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program supports active research participation by undergraduate students in any of the areas of research funded by the National Science Foundation.
- Within the Department of Energy's (DOE) Office of Science, the Office of Workforce Development for Teachers and Scientists provides a continuum of research opportunities to both students and teachers in the STEM fields. The Faculty and Student Teams (FaST) program pairs a college or university faculty member with two to three students for summer research programs at Department of Energy National Laboratories and is important to the field of undergraduate research.

Other federal programs, including the Undergraduate Research Collaborative and the Nanotechnology Undergraduate Education at NSF, Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and the Greater Research Opportunities Undergraduate Fellowships at the Environmental Protection Agency are among those that provide funding for undergraduate research capacity. The breadth of the agencies supportive of undergraduate research belies its value to the country and its priorities.

We look forward to working with new leadership at these and other agencies to share our expertise and experience in the field of undergraduate research. Clearly, CUR is heartened by President-elect Obama's pledges to restore integrity to US science policy, expand investment in research and development, and make a national commitment to STEM education.

Thank you for your attention to these views. As the transition proceeds, if we can provide you with any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202-783-4810 or [nancy@cur.org](mailto:nancy@cur.org).

Sincerely,



Nancy Hensel  
Executive Officer