

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAM DIRECTORS



— NewsBriefs —

Message from Our Chair By: Janice DeCosmo

Welcome to new and continuing URPD members and colleagues! I hope the academic year is going well for you, and that your undergraduate research (UR) efforts are evolving in new and exciting ways.

It is wonderful to see UR as part of the national conversation in higher education— CUR's recently published COEUR (Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research), provides a series of benchmarks against which campuses can measure their progress. I have seen lots of conversation over our URPD listserv this fall initiated by new UR directors and campus advocates who are establishing and growing UR offices. Thanks to all of you who responded with great information and tips for the newcomers!

There is much that we can learn from each other, and that is what inspired this newsletter as well as the URPD conference, which will take place just after the CUR business meeting this June at Chapman University in California. We need your participation to make the conference a success! All faculty and staff involved in undergraduate research are invited to the Windows of Opportunity conference, organized around the important themes of Broadening Participation, Assessment, Curricular Innovations, Administrative Nuts and Bolts, and Marketing and Public Relations for UR. I hope that you will consider coming to share your work, and learn from and with your colleagues (see side bar and http://www.cur.org/conferences_and_events/gateways_to_best_practices_for_undergraduate_research_program_directors/).

Case Study: An Interdisciplinary Study Abroad Research Experience By: Kimberly Reiter

I needed a way to bring research-based English history to life beyond the classroom without resorting to the standard “museum and art” tour. The course that has developed over the past 14 years incorporated environmental, demographic, resource-management, heritage management and structural elements into the historic. To make the course into something more than just a trip, there are several strategies and research activities. Besides daily readings, there are daily entries in a journal, sketches of artifacts and elements, and on-site interviews. A term paper, to be delivered on site, addressing a historical issue in direct relationship to a site, is also expected, while students are given personal and team research assignments ahead of time that bring in individual aspects of their own research applied to various venues and situations.

The research project is selected based on the disciplinary interests of the students. This year, a dual Environmental Science/History major chose to look at the changing ecology of Dartmoor as it experienced a significant climate shift in the later Bronze Age. She presented her research to the class at an isolated Bronze Age village site in Dartmoor, and her experience has led her to pursue conservation management at the graduate level next year. Another student who in 2010 chose to research the Romanization of North Britain went on to excavate in Britain in 2011, write her senior research from her excavation experience and begin graduate work in north England in Roman archaeology. Students were asked in two teams to research the strategies for taking and defending a typical British hillfort, and then presented the chance to test their ideas at Maiden Castle (although we substitute bean bags for ballistics).

Several lessons have been learned. Two disparate fields can have a common interest. There is a sense of adventure in planning out the exact sites that will highlight work in both fields in ways that augment what one could learn in a class seat. Moreover, students have the opportunity in a team-taught situation to see how research can be approached didactically from totally opposite but valid methodologies. From such an interdisciplinary approach comes a willingness to venture outside student and faculty disciplines. Finally, at the end of the day, we have chances to sit with the students and have academic conversations unimaginable in the class setting.

For more information on how to construct a team-taught interdisciplinary field research course, please contact kreiter@stetson.edu, or visit <http://www4.cookman.edu/faculty/reiter/uk2012.htm>

Upcoming Events

College Students Educators
International

March 4-7 (Las Vegas, NV)
Convention.myacpa.org

CUR Dialogues

February 21-23 (Washington
DC)
www.CUR.org

Student Success and the
Quality Agenda Network
for Academic Renewal
Conference

April 4-6 (Miami, FL)
www.aacu.org/meetings

National Conference On
Undergraduate Research
April 11-13 (La Crosse, WI)
www.cur.org/ncur_2013

URPD Special Offering
Windows of Opportunity:
Undergraduate Research
Conference

June 22-23, 2013
www.CUR.org
Poster Submissions Due
February 15

Would you like to stay
connected with URPD all year
long? Or contact the group
with questions or support? If
so, please sign up for the URPD
Listserv with these easy steps:

- Visit www.CUR.org
- Select Discussion
Forums under
Membership tab
- Click Subscription
page
- Enter your email and
name
- Click URPD
- Wait for your
confirmation email

Spotlight: Team Based-Interdisciplinary Research

by Suma Datta and Bethany Usher

Q&A

Do you have a way to track participants beyond graduation?

“Facebook, Google, our campus alumni association, are some of the tools we use. First, though, we let students know before they graduate that we will track them, and we use an annual check-in web survey – and let them know when to expect it. Most students do fill it out. Of course, you need a good email address for that which can be challenging.”

“Most of the time students are easy to find if they are in graduate programs. Our experience is that if you haven’t heard from a student they may not be doing very well – or, they may be overseas, even if not in a remote area they can be much harder to find.”

“We have students sign up for LinkedIn as part of their professional development workshops, and encourage them to keep up the accounts after graduation.”

As the world’s problems become too complex for a single discipline, a team interdisciplinary approach becomes critical. Team-based interdisciplinary undergraduate research provides an excellent way for students with different expertise to address more complex issues, while gaining valuable skills for their future careers. As faculty time becomes scarce, the ability of an advisor to work with students who provide each other with peer support gives more students the opportunity to participate in a research experience. Interdisciplinary teams can result from formal institutional initiatives or grow organically from a faculty member’s research requirements. Undergraduate Research programs benefit by supporting these projects, but a challenge is connecting students and faculty beyond their home departments. We present two models, and encourage our colleagues to share theirs at the upcoming URPD meeting in June 2013.

At Texas A&M we see naturally occurring interdisciplinary teams, but team building is encouraged through our Undergraduate Research Team Program. Teams write a single proposal that outlines the project and the role of each team member. Research is conducted over the academic year culminating with a presentation and a jointly written thesis. Team building is further encouraged through workshops that emphasize interdisciplinary projects and an Expo where faculty recruit undergraduate researchers by describing their projects and the types of expertise they need. Find out more at <http://honors.tamu.edu/>

At George Mason University, the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities and Research supports interdisciplinary projects proposed by faculty through Collaborative Project Scholarship Development Grants. For example, four faculty and staff have formed the Science of Diversity Project; a team of ten undergraduate students who study how and why diversity works at Mason. Our Undergraduate Research Scholars Program provides flexibility so that interdisciplinary teams of two to three students can work with a single mentor on a project. Faculty recruit student participants through courses, listservs, and by posting undergraduate research opportunities on our HireMason database. Find out more at <http://oscar.gmu.edu>

URPD Updates & Accomplishments

Welcome to three new undergraduate research directors: **John Augusto** (Univ. of Kansas), **Sarah Kriz** (Univ. of San Diego) and **Nick Bieser** (Univ. of Alabama at Birmingham).

A 2-year \$22,650 University of Wisconsin System grant will support continued work, begun with a CUR grant, to institutionalize undergraduate research across the System.

How are CUR members and campus leaders using the *Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research (COEUR)* document? Please use this link to go to a very short survey about your experiences using COEUR www.surveymonkey.com/s/COEUR-document-survey.

University of Missouri has received a \$3.1 million IMSD grant from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences for underrepresented students to conduct research.

Several URPD members have chapters in the new book, “Faculty Support and Undergraduate Research: Innovations in Faculty Role Definition, Workload, and Reward”. Congrats to **Jenny Shanahan** and **Bessie Guerrant**.

Janet Stocks has a new position: Associate Provost at Trinity Washington University in D.C. Best of luck, Janet!

URPD NewsBriefs Committee:
Kimberly Schneider (Editor,
KRS@ucf.edu), Anne Boettcher,
Janice DeCosmo, Kimberly Reiter,
Korine Steinke Wawrzynski

COUNCIL ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

734 15th St. N.W. Suite 550 Washington, DC 20005 | T: (202) 783-4810 | F: (202) 783-4811 | E: cur@cur.org
www.cur.org