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 staff 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 officials. 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, a semiannual “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 staffers 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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UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH


This manuscript describes the direct imaging discovery of a ‘Super-Jupiter’ around the high mass star Kappa Andromedae. With an orbital semimajor axis about twice that of Neptune, and a mass about 12.8 Jupiter masses, the discovery represents one of only a handful of extrasolar planets ever directly imaged, and the only such case around a star so massive. The discovery suggests that stars as massive as 2.5 solar masses are still fully capable of producing planets within their primordial circumstellar disks. Joe Carson is an associate professor of physics & astronomy at the College of Charleston. Undergraduate authors Thea Kozakis, Laura Stevens, Palmer Wong, and Kevin Gainey, all astrophysics majors, were intimately involved in the investigation for this research, senior thesis research, and independent study, from 2011 to 2012. The research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (awarded to Carson) and the College of Charleston SURF program (awarded to Kozakis).


This study examined chondrichthyan teeth from exposures of Wooster (College of Wooster) from 2011 to 2012. The research was supported by a grant of The College of Wooster. Undergraduate authors Thea Kozakis, Laura Stevens, Palmer Wong, and Kevin Gainey, all astrophysics majors, were intimately involved in the investigation for this research, senior thesis research, and independent study, from 2011 to 2012. The research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (awarded to Carson) and the College of Charleston SURF program (awarded to Kozakis).

Some animals in nature possess a mechanism to survive severe water loss through the expression of highly hydrophilic proteins. These proteins are named LEA proteins and are thought to interact with membranes and proteins in order to protect and maintain cellular functions during drying and desiccation. Genes for the fruit fly Drosophila melanogaster cells were genetically engineered to express a specific mitochondrial targeted LEA protein from the brine shrimp Artemia franciscana (AEL1A1.3). Expression of AEL1A1.3 significantly reduced the negative effects of freezing and osmotic stress on fly cells and mitochondria. Our study demonstrates that AEL1A1.3 exerts a protective influence on mitochondrial functions and increased the viability of D. melanogaster cells in several water stress models. Dr. Michael Menze is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Eastern Illinois University. Matthew Marunde is an undergraduate student at Eastern Illinois University majoring in Biology with a minor in chemistry. He conducted most of his research in 2011 and 2012, especially in the summers of 2011 and 2012. Matthew’s future goal is continue his education at medical school. Eastern Illinois University Honors College URSCA grants, Eastern Illinois University Council on Faculty Research grants, National Science Foundation IOS-0920254.