



December 23, 2016

President-Elect Donald J. Trump  
Trump Tower  
725 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
New York, NY 10022  
Transmitted via email to Transition Team Members

Dear President-Elect Trump,

The Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) is a dynamic and vibrant non-profit organization of more than 11,000 members, representing close to 900 institutions. We are the voice for undergraduate research, both nationally, and increasingly, internationally, and dedicated to providing programs and services to support high-quality faculty-mentored undergraduate student research.

CUR identifies undergraduate research as an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline, in close collaboration with faculty members and other professional mentors. Undergraduate research is a key concept within the pantheon of strategies that encompass the active learning movement, and moves students from passive participants in lecture-based classroom experiences, to independent researchers, with strong critical thinking, communication, organizational, and team work skills. Simply put, undergraduate researchers gain the real-life experience that employers and the research enterprise need and say that can't find in today's typical novice employee or researcher.

Our members represent a diverse cross-section of the country. They hail from community colleges to baccalaureate-granting institutions, large public institutions and small private colleges, military and religious institutions, rural and urban settings, and from all fifty states. CUR has also begun to work with young researchers overseas, and we recently completed our first international congress on undergraduate research in Qatar. Additionally, CUR is a founding partner in the Community College Undergraduate Research Initiative (CCURI), and continues to support their work with 38 institutional partners to support the practice of undergraduate research at the community college level.

Undergraduate research yields myriad benefits to students, communities and the nation:

- Undergraduate research has been cited by numerous national reports and experts, including the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, as a powerful strategy for increasing student retention in degree programs, boosting student graduation rates, and increasing students' level of professional and academic aspiration, particularly for students who historically underrepresented in STEM fields and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Undergraduate research builds core competencies in the skills valued in the workplace, preparing students to contribute to the local and national economies.



CUR member the University of Wisconsin System, for example, has a student body that comes to its schools from a 75 mile radius, and those students typically return to their communities to work. Undergraduate research prepares those students to be successful contributors upon graduation.

- Undergraduate researchers have made major discoveries that contribute to the advancement of our nation. For example, Planetary Scientist Lujendra Ojha, a CUR honorary fellow in 2016, was recognized for his collaborative work that discovered evidence of flowing water on Mars. Mr. Ojha started his research discoveries as an undergraduate student at the University of Arizona, where he was selected to present at the 2011 Posters on the Hill reception. It was as an undergraduate that Ojha helped make one of the biggest scientific discoveries of recent history.

CUR believes that for the U.S. to retain its position as an innovative leader there must be a two-pronged approach to research and innovation: the discovery of new knowledge must be coupled with the fostering of future researchers through research training grants and other types of direct support. All sectors of higher education, including research-intensive Master's and Ph.D. granting institutions, predominantly undergraduate four-year institutions, as well as community colleges, should be encouraged to connect the *creation* of new knowledge and the *process* of discovery-based knowledge to support innovation. One without the other is insufficient to ensuring the long-term vitality of the nation's workforce and its economic well-being.

Federal investments in undergraduate research play a critical role in engaging students, and are particularly sound, as they cultivate the workforce, strengthen campuses and grow the research enterprise. CUR strongly supports continued and enhanced federal support for undergraduate research, particularly for members of groups historically underrepresented in higher education.

Thus, we recommend and support the following for the Administration's overall policy agenda:

- Adequate support for programs that are critical to campus undergraduate research efforts, including the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Programs at the Department of Education, as well as many of the research fellowship programs funded by the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, and Department of Defense agencies;
- Preservation of a strong role for the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy in informing presidential priorities and policies and the appointment of a strong national science advisor as the incoming administration hopes to improve the rank of the United States in the competitive global economy.
- Support for undergraduate research in a reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*. Higher education has never been more important, for individual advancement, and for the economy, yet we keep hearing the same stories: students are not able to get to graduation to get their degrees, or worse yet, they graduate with a costly degree that doesn't provide the professional preparation sought by employers.



Undergraduate research is a strategy that is proven and popular, and it leads to increases in degree attainment for undergraduate students.

Each spring, CUR holds a showcase event in Washington, DC, called Posters on the Hill. The event affords an elite group of students the opportunity to share their undergraduate research with Members of Congress, congressional staff, federal government officials, academics and other researchers. As part of their experience in the nation's capital, students are invited to the White House to hear from staff at the Office of Science and Technology Policy who themselves carried out research as undergraduates. We hope to carry on this tradition with your administration.

Thank you for your leadership. We look forward to working with you and your administration, our partner organizations, and the colleges and universities that are committed to thoroughly transforming higher education from passive to active learning pathways. Together, we can create professionals superbly equipped to undertake research, translate research to economic benefit, and use the results of research to solve the pressing challenges our society faces.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth L. Ambos".

Elizabeth L. Ambos  
Executive Officer  
Council on Undergraduate Research