UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLARS PROGRAM
SCHOLAR HANDBOOK

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STAFF

URS PROGRAM OFFICE

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Program Overview

The Undergraduate Research Scholars program (URS) is dedicated to enhancing the academic lives of UW-Madison students by providing first and second year undergraduates with opportunities to earn credit for participating in the research and creative work of UW-Madison faculty and staff. The program has been designed to include partnerships between students and mentors, seminars on research-relevant issues, and practice in research/artistic presentations. The many benefits of the program are found in the fluid interaction between these activities.

Admission to URS

URS is intended to be a two-semester experience. Admitted students attend an orientation meeting, enter the program in the fall semester, and register for URS research credits (2 or 3) in both fall and spring semesters.

Freshmen and sophomores in any UW-Madison school or college are eligible to be URS scholars. The program admits incoming first-year students the summer before their first college fall semester. Currently enrolled first-year students may also apply for admission in the spring, to start in the fall of their sophomore year. URS also admits new transfer students who might benefit from being involved in the program during their first year at UW-Madison. All interested students must complete an on-line application form providing details about their previous experience and their motivation for research. Admission is based on the student’s overall motivation and potential to benefit from the Program.

Faculty/Staff Mentoring

The essence of the URS Program is the Scholar/Research Mentor relationship and the opportunity it gives you to engage in inquiry-based learning and/or creative work. As a research scholar you will gain experience probing the unexplained, exploring the possible, creating new knowledge, and/or producing works of art. The impact can be profound and life-changing. Mentors guide students in learning many aspects of a research process including but not limited to:

1. Data gathering techniques
2. Critical reading of literature
3. Developing a thesis, question, and/or hypotheses
4. Research design
5. Presenting research results; communicating research
6. Careers in research
7. Research writing (proposals, writing for research in process, etc.)
8. Research ethics
Research Fellows

Research Fellows are juniors and seniors who have had research experience. They forge a crucial link between URS scholars and the program’s professional staff. Your Research Fellows develop and facilitate your weekly seminar, assist you with finding research opportunities, and serve as role models on the road to graduation. Research fellows participate in ongoing training and are supervised by professional staff. Finally, your research fellow is a contact for you should problems or concerns arise regarding your progress and performance in assisting your mentor.

URS Weekly Small Group Seminars

URS Seminars explore the research enterprise and the university experience. The seminars meet weekly on Wednesdays and are facilitated by two Research Fellows. These sessions are designed to remove the mystique of the big university and replace it with knowledge about the campus and the broader aspects of research and creative work, and to address research-related topics of interest to students across the sciences, humanities, social sciences, and arts. These small groups allow scholars to voice their views and develop arguments to support them, explore research ethics, and give each other invaluable support and feedback.

Research Presentations

At the end of fall semester, scholars give short oral presentations about their research work or artistic project. Doing a presentation gives you an opportunity to share findings with other scholars, get feedback on ideas, and share enthusiasm for the hard work you have completed. The presentations are a step toward developing your personal presentation style, knowledge, and confidence about the research work.

At the end of spring semester, all scholars participate in the campus-wide Undergraduate Symposium, where you formally present your work. The Undergraduate Symposium will be held in April. Each scholar is required to submit a research abstract that must be approved by his or her research mentor in order to be accepted at the symposium.

The URS presentations are part of your seminar grade and are evaluated by your Research Fellows in collaboration with URS staff.
Inter L&S 250 and Registration for Credit

Only first- and second-year students who have been admitted to URS may register for Inter L&S 250. The course permits registration for 2 to 3 credits. How many credits you register for depends on how many hours per week you devote to the assigned research or creative project. Working on research for 4 to 6 hours per week earns 2 credits. Most students should be registered in Inter L&S 250 for 2 credits. If the research project you are involved with requires 7-12 hours a week that will earn you 3 credits per semester. In some cases, a research mentor will prefer that you register for directed study or special problems credits under their supervision in their academic department. In such cases, contact the Program Director and she will assist you in resolving the situation.

URS Research Contract

After completing interviews with prospective mentors and setting up research positions (see next section, “Finding a Research Opportunity”) you must work out the details of the research or creative project experience with your Research Mentors. Together, you and your mentor must write these details on the URS Research Contract. The contract (see sample at the end of this handbook) should clearly outline the specific tasks you are responsible for, the number of hours per week you are expected to work, and the number of credits, either 2 or 3, that the research mentor believes is appropriate for the amount of time invested. Both must sign and date the contract. If you need a copy of the contract please ask your fellows. You must submit a copy of the contract to your Research Fellows or to URS office the first week in October.

URS Research and Federal Work Study Policy

As a URS Scholar, you are permitted to earn Federal Work Study (FWS) pay for part of the work you do as a research assistant through the URS Program if you are eligible for FWS funds, and if your Research Mentor has funds to pay the “employer” portion of your salary. Your mentor’s departmental office will be responsible for collecting your reports of FWS hours worked (time sheets) and for processing them so you are paid. You may not earn more than your FWS allocation per semester. The departmental office is required to have on file a description of your work position paid for by FWS funds.
Grading in Inter L&S 250

Performance in both components of Inter L&S 250 – the research work and the weekly seminar – comprise your final grade. Your research effort comprises 75% of the grade, which the Research Mentor will determine. The URS Director and staff, in direct consultation with your Research Fellows, will determine the remaining 25%.

The following guidelines are suggested for Research Mentors:

A Exceptional. Student took initiative or performed all duties above and beyond expectations.
AB Active engagement in research activity, completed all assignments, reported to work regularly and for expected number of hours, developed new skills and applied them appropriately.
B Did not fully meet expectations. Somewhat engaged in research activity, did not always work expected number of hours, no evidence of new or improved ability for systematic inquiry.
BC-C Below expectations. Minimal initiative and engagement. Poor performance in all areas.
< C Very Poor performance in all areas.

It is important for you to get ongoing feedback on your research performance. Do not hesitate to take the first step and ask your Research Mentor to meet with you about your work performance. Since every research experience is unique, it is difficult to establish the same grading process for all URS scholars. For this reason, you need to take initiative and talk with your Research Mentor about your work performance, which will help you immensely. During the writing of your research contract, you should ask your mentor for clarification on which aspects of your work will contribute to the research grade. Would it involve acquiring new skills with a certain level of consistent performance, or compiling a set of documents, or entering a set of data, or reading and interpreting part of the literature on the research, or even preparing a short report about your experience? If appropriate, you may take the initiative to suggest what you might be graded on. Doing so will allow you a much greater sense of involvement in the experience and less uncertainty about how your grades will be determined. As the semester progresses you should check in regularly with your Mentor about your progress.

At the end of each semester, Research Mentors and the URS Director will consult about each student’s grade. The URS Director will submit final grades to the Registrar.
FINDING A RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Finding a research position in URS entails attending an orientation meeting in which you identify 2-3 interesting projects from the Research Opportunities book, and discuss any questions you may have with URS staff. The research positions described in the Opportunities Book are submitted to URS by UW faculty and staff interested in having undergraduates work with them. You will search this book and select two to three research positions that appeal to you.

IMPORTANT!!! After you attend an orientation session, it is up to you to contact the research mentors and set up appointments to meet for interviews.

Below is a sample email to use as a template when contacting prospective mentors.

To: mentoremailaddress@wisc.edu

From: scholaremailaddress@wisc.edu (use your wisc.edu account and not any other email address as yahoo, gmail, etc.)

Subject: Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

Dear Professor/ Dr. LastNameOfTheMentor (advice: in an academic environment professional titles as Dr. and Professor are preferred to formal titles Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.)

My name is (__________) and I am participating in the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program. I am contacting you regarding a research opportunity (Name of opportunity) you listed with URS. I would like to set up an in interview to discuss my possible involvement with your project.

I am (first/second) year student at the UW-Madison and I am interested in (mention your general career interests or specific discipline interests.) (You can continue in this paragraph with any background experience you might have that might be relevant to this project and might attract Mentor’s attention.) I am interested in this opportunity because (state main reason(s) that attracted you to this project. Be concise.)

I would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience for a half hour interview. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
BuckyBadger, URScholar
**Tips for Getting a Research Position**

**INTERVIEWING??** You might be surprised you have to interview with a faculty or staff person – a prospective Research Mentor – about the research or creative opportunity. Both you and the Research Mentor have a choice about working together. **It should be a mutual decision.** Through the interview process, you and the prospective Mentor will learn about each other, and you will learn more about what the Mentor’s project entails. Then you both will have a chance to decide if it would be a good opportunity to develop your skills and interests.

Finding a project can be a bit stressful during the hectic first few weeks of school, but if you keep the following tips in mind your search will help you find what you want.

1) **Don’t delay!** Contact prospective mentors by phone or email and set up appointments to interview as soon as possible. It is important to get started on a project as early in the fall semester as possible.

2) Think carefully about what you want to gain from and contribute to the research project. Carefully assess whether a research or creative project offers the opportunity to acquire the skills or knowledge you desire.

3) At the same time, **keep an open mind** and be willing to apply for projects outside of your proposed major or discipline.

4) Don’t be intimidated by the kinds of tasks the Research Mentor has listed for the project. As long as you are willing to learn new skills, you are probably eligible for the project.

5) Use the interview as an opportunity to get to know the Research Mentor and vice versa. Ask about things such as who supervises the work, how many hours are expected, what the work entails, etc.

6) If you have any questions at any point in the process, consult your Research Fellows who have gone through it and will be able to give you sound advice.

7) **Contact all Research Mentors with whom you’ve interviewed to let them know with whom you’ve decided to work.**

8) Research contracts must be submitted to your Research Fellow by the first week of October.
What Do Research Mentors Look For?

Faculty sponsors generally look for things that fall into four broad categories: technical skills, general abilities, motivation, and personality characteristics. Here are some specifics they might look for.

- **Interests** - are you interested in the research area?
- **Compatibility** - will you fit into the organization of her/his research project? Does your weekly schedule fit with the needs of the project?
- **Thoughtfulness** - are you capable of making a contribution to the research project? Did you ask thoughtful questions about the project?
- **Motivation** - will you be self-motivated to do the required work?
- **Enthusiasm** - are you enthusiastic and interested in the project, field, or topic?
- **Assertiveness** - can you think on your own and stand up for your ideas?
- **Adaptability** - can you adapt to a field or project that is forever changing?
- **Maturity** - can you accept responsibility and get along with all types of people?
- **Independence** - are you able to work on your own?
- **Communication** - can you articulate your thoughts effectively? Are you willing to ask questions or seek clarification?
- **Commitment** - are you serious about the research and willing to make the project an important part of your work load?

What To Do at an Interview

- **Do** dress properly. Wear a nice shirt or blouse with casual slacks or skirt.
- **Do** find the office ahead of time and be prompt.
- **Do** address the interviewer by his/her professional title. Ex: **Professor** Smith
- **Do** listen attentively and show interest, be engaged.
- **Do** read the position description carefully and bring notes to the interview.
- **Do** prepare some answers to common interview questions in advance.
- **Do** appear enthusiastic!
- **Do** remember the interviewer’s name and use it throughout the interview.
- **Do** present a confident self-image.
- **Do** focus your attention on what the interviewer is saying and listen to the content.
- **Do** take notes during the discussion.
- **Do** let the research mentor know ahead of time if you must miss the interview.
- **Do** deliver answers to interview questions without sounding rehearsed.
Suggested Questions You Might Ask at an Interview

- What is the purpose of the research?
- How long has the project been going?
- How many hours am I expected to work? When?
- What type of background knowledge am I expected to have? How can I acquire this knowledge, if I don’t already have it?
- Do I need any outside training (e.g. radiation workshop, library workshop, animal handling course)?
- What role or additional responsibilities would I be given in the project as I gain more experience?
- What type of work will I be doing (e.g. data entry, observations, experiments, interviews, transcription)?
- Does the project involve working with animals, radiation, computers, chemicals, hazardous materials, etc.? (anything you are particularly concerned about)
- Am I expected to work at home?
- Can I attend lab or research meetings?
- Will I ever be expected to miss classes for meetings?
- How flexible will my hours be? Am I allowed to have time off for exams?
- Will I be directly working with you or with someone else on the project? Who will be my day-to-day supervisor?

EXPECTATIONS FOR YOUR RESEARCH THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

Ask your Research Mentor what is expected of you so you can achieve the goals set out for you, and beyond. Please keep in mind that you are a representative of the entire URS program. Your conduct in all aspects of your research is a reflection of the whole program. Please conduct yourself responsibly at all times and follow all guidelines established in your research situation. Here are some tips to help you foster a mutually beneficial partnership with your Mentor and your research team.

- Arrive at work on time and ready to work. Follow your assigned research schedule.
- Be respectful of your Research Mentor and Research Fellows.
- If an emergency situation or sickness occurs and absence is a necessity, communicate promptly with your Research Mentor about your absence.
- Express yourself clearly.
• Be enthusiastic and positive.
• Accept responsibility for your actions.
• Keep your Research Fellows updated on your experience and discuss any concerns with them and with your Mentor.
• Be hardworking and productive.
• Ask questions until you understand.
• Address your Research Mentor as “Professor” or “Dr.” or whatever their title is and their last name, unless they give your permission to call them otherwise.
• As you are given assignments, make sure you understand fully what is required and when it must be completed. If you don’t, ask questions.
• Keep up with all URS weekly seminar assignments.
• Where possible, read background literature about the project. Ask your Research Mentor for readings that will help you understand the research.
• Follow office or lab procedure and etiquette.
• Interact with a variety of people at work.
• If you work with other scholars on the same project, remember you are a team and need to work together to achieve success.
• If you complete your assigned tasks early, ask for additional work or assist others.
Undergraduate Research Scholars Program

URS Scholar/Research Mentor Research Contract

Scholar: Copy this form. Keep one and submit the other to your URS Fellows by October 5th

Scholar’s Name ___________________________ UW ID Number ________________________
Email ___________________________ Date ___________________________
Scholar’s URS Fellows ____________________________________________

Research Mentor (to whom the student directly reports)
Name ___________________________ Email ___________________________
Highest degree completed ___________________________
Title, Dept., School/College ____________________________________________

Additional Mentor (who will assign the grade, if different from above)
Name ___________________________ Email ___________________________
Highest degree completed ___________________________
Title, Department., School ____________________________________________

Project Title ____________________________________________

Hours/Week of Work (formal and informal meetings with mentor, independent and collaborative work, etc.) _______
Equivalent number of INTER-L&S 250 Credits (circle one): 2cr (4-6 hrs/week) 3cr (7-10 hrs/week)

Aspects of research in which the scholar will learn (check all that apply and add what is missing)

☐ Data gathering techniques
☐ Developing a thesis, question, and/or hypotheses
☐ Presenting research results; communicating research
☐ Research writing (writing a proposal, writing for research in process, etc.)
☐ Research ethics
☐ Other(s): ____________________________________________________________________________

Specific tasks for which the scholar will be responsible (list clearly, print on back or attach):

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

_________________________ ____________________________
URS Scholar Signature, Date Research Mentor Signature, Date

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