



March 2012

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Recommended Citation

Russell, Sarah (2012) "University of Tennessee Expands Undergraduate Research Initiatives," *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 11.
Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol3/iss2/11>

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University of Tennessee Expands Undergraduate Research Initiatives

By Sarah Russell

The University of Tennessee's drive to become a Top 25 research university has not only prompted new opportunities for research and creative achievement, but also new ways to share, promote, and educate about research. Undergraduate research has increasingly been involved in this dialogue, and because of the initiatives of faculty, staff, and students, the opportunities for undergraduates to perform and present their research are abundant.

The recently created Office of Undergraduate Research and its affiliated website serve as a centralized location for information for undergraduate students looking to perform research of their own. The Office and its website provide information about research opportunities, programs for funding, conferences and events dedicated to the presentation of research, and profiles of student and faculty research endeavors. Potential researchers can search the website for internships both within and outside of the university, as well as a list of events at which researchers can present their work. In addition, the website features advice on how to begin to perform research and why research is important. The formation of an Office of Undergraduate Research as well as the consolidation of research information onto a new website create connections and resources for both new and experienced undergraduate researchers. "The mission of the Office of Research is to enable all faculty, other investigators, and students to achieve their full potential as scholars," says Dr. Gregory Reed, associate vice chancellor of research. "When it comes to helping undergraduates pursue their full potential as scholars, I like to think of helping them become intellectual entrepreneurs. Our nation is in need of such students to help us be globally competitive and to remain leaders in our global economy."

The Office of Undergraduate Research is also a member of an external organization of universities with undergraduate research initiatives. According to its website, the Council of Undergraduate Research, or CUR, consists of almost 600 colleges and institutions who are dedicated to the promotion of research opportunities for their undergraduate students. CUR also features a Registry of Undergraduate Researchers, which provides information about matching students with research experience with graduate schools. Faculty, staff, and students at the University of Tennessee are eligible to register for free for an Enhanced Membership to CUR's website, which also features a subscription to its

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online journal, *CUR Quarterly*. This institution is yet another resource available to undergraduate researchers at the University of Tennessee to facilitate education about undergraduate research and to enable students with research experience to find graduate schools in their field.

Another new opportunity for undergraduate researchers at the University of Tennessee is the Undergraduate Research Students' Association. Founded by juniors Mark Remec and Melissa Lee, the Association, or URSA, is a student-run organization that seeks to promote and expand upon the pursuit of undergraduate research in all departments at the University of Tennessee. It also serves to provide links between potential student researchers and faculty mentors – as Remec says, “We want to help undergraduates realize the vast benefits of doing research, and then also help faculty and undergraduates connect to build valuable research endeavors.” The organization is continuing to develop, planning to name student representatives in each department on campus who will serve as liaisons between the departments and URSA in order to improve relationships between faculty members and undergraduate researchers.

The University of Tennessee also provides numerous opportunities for students to present their research through on campus symposiums and exhibitions. Our annual Research Week features the Exhibition of Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement (EURēCA), at which undergraduate students assemble posters regarding their research experiences and participate in a judged competition. Research Week also includes several on-campus conferences open to undergraduate researchers. The Baker Scholars host an exhibition for sharing their research that takes place in the Baker Center. The Marco Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies Undergraduate Conference features papers about the conference's theme as well as on general topics related to medieval and Renaissance studies. The conference is open to students throughout the United States and Canada, promoting dialogue between undergraduate researchers across North America. In addition, the Honors Symposium takes place at the end of Research Week. It provides the opportunity for undergraduate students in the Chancellor's Honors Program and specialized or departmental honors programs to present their research to their peers. Each student gives a short presentation, which is then followed by a question and answer period.

Outside of Research Week, the University of Tennessee is also involved in other opportunities for the presentation of undergraduate research and creative achievement. Each year, several undergraduate students attended Posters at the Capitol, a program where undergraduate researchers from colleges and universities across Tennessee present their research to state legislators at the Capitol Building in Nashville. The College of Communication and Information presents their Annual Research Symposium, featuring peer-reviewed presentations and a guest speaker. Finally, the School of Music holds their Celebration of Excellence Competition in the James R. Cox Auditorium to showcase the talent of the music students at the University of Tennessee.

The wide variety of information available through the Office of Undergraduate Research and its website creates a centralized location for interested undergraduates to pursue their research and creative interests and find opportunities to perform research, both within and outside of the university. The Council of Undergraduate Research allows undergraduate researchers to join in a national community of fellow researchers and assists in pairing undergraduates with rigorous graduate schools in their fields, and the Undergraduate Research Students' Association provides connections between academic departments and student researchers right on campus. Additionally, the upcoming on-campus opportunities like EURēCA, the Marco Undergraduate Conference, and the Honors

Symposium are excellent opportunities to present undergraduate research. The initiatives taken by the University of Tennessee for the promotion of undergraduate research are extensive and serve to encourage and support the pursuit of education through research even before graduate school.