Summer Research 2012

This summer Oxy’s campus was overrun with student researchers participating in the 2012 Summer Research Program (SRP). Students from almost every major worked one-on-one with faculty mentors to answer their own research question or to aid in a professor’s pre-established research effort. In the process, students developed their leadership abilities and various skills for career development and future research opportunities. Close collaboration between the research fellow and his or her faculty mentor is an essential feature of the program. Each fellow is expected to have a full-time exclusive commitment to research for ten weeks. Students must participate in research ethics training, meetings with peers and mentors, special gatherings, and assessments during the research period.

I interviewed Kirsten Easton (Sociology and Theater ‘13) and Joshua Erdman (Economics ‘13) about their respective experiences in the program. Kirsten titled her research project, “What’s in a Recipe?: Gender and the Food Network;” her faculty mentor was Prof. Danielle Dirks of the Sociology department. Josh titled his project, “Analyzing Poverty and Migration Trends in Puerto Rico;” his faculty mentor was Prof. Mary Lopez of the Economics department.

What was the best part of your summer research experience?
Kirsten: I liked the fact that I was able to conceive and carry out an original project. Most undergraduates don’t have the opportunity to work for themselves.
Josh: The best part of my summer research experience was getting a true feel for the academic research process. The experience not only helped me develop my time management skills, but really helped me flesh out my understanding of the lengthy academic research process in which academic faculty are constantly immersed.

What is one of the most interesting facts you learned about your research topic this summer?
Kirsten: My research topic focused on the portrayal of gender on the Food Network, specifically through the recipes cooked on the shows. I learned that gender is constantly shifting and changing on the FN, but that we still have a long way to go before we see men and women appearing in similar shows.

Josh: Just how many variables can push and pull a rate of any kind. With respect to my research, I found that Puerto Rican immigrants can function as labor complements or labor substitutes to the native workforce. These relationships have the potential to impact poverty in seemingly opposing ways. This demonstrates just how difficult it is to truly come to a conclusion in social sciences such as economics.

Will your summer research continue on into future research at Oxy?
Kirsten: My summer research was the base for what will be my Senior Comps in Sociology.
Josh: As the logical follow-up to my inconclusive summer research, I am now working as a research assistant for my faculty mentor. We will continue to look at how immigration influences poverty in Puerto Rico throughout my senior year.

What impact will your research have on your future at Oxy in terms of classes, relationships with faculty or other students, future occupation, etc.?
Kirsten: One of the greatest things I have heard about my project was that others who had heard about my research or attended my talk are now looking at the messages that the Food Network provides more critically. For me, that is a big first step.
Josh: My research experience impacted all of the above. I now am able to approach my classes more holistically and have more developed ideas for the final research projects that accompany many economics classes. With respect to my future, my successful experience doing undergraduate research has made graduate school and academia realistic opportunities for me instead of lofty dreams.
Oxy maintains a fund to support small academic projects performed by full-time degree-seeking students during the academic year. These funds may be used for consumables for an independent study project, comps research, or travel to local field research sites or research subjects. Supplies for art, video and performance projects, oral history, and education outreach in the local community may also be funded. Projects must be primarily academic in nature, although not-for-credit activities can receive support. Funds will be awarded to students on a competitive basis. Grants are limited to the range $50 to $300 per project. The ASP grant is not intended to be the sole support for any project. The early decision deadline for the spring grants is November 30th. The regular deadline is January 25, 2013.

Associated Student Projects

Dylan Leong ‘13
Art History & Visual Arts
Mentor: Prof. Broderick Fox

Last year, I was in the Advanced Video Projects class, in which we all were tasked with the assignment of creating a short video piece. Every year, it seemed as though people only thought to follow two paths: documentary or narrative. I chose to blaze my own path by producing two separate commercials. Looking back on it all, the ASP grant gave me the sufficient boost I needed in order to break into the advertising realm of filmmaking. While other students wrote stories, I wrote in products and made sure that viewers of my commercials had one thing on their mind: the specific product. I also believe that the ASP grant allowed me to carry out my commercials in the utmost professional way because I could feed all my actors, dress them appropriately for camera, and provide props for the mise-en-scene of each shot.

Rachel Safran ‘13
Kinesiology
Mentor: Prof. Gary Martin

My projects for the fall and spring semesters of last year examined the regenerative properties of fibroblasts and quantified their abundance in zebrafish myocardium. Cardiac fibroblasts are important for homeostasis and detection of pathological stimuli in the heart tissue; they also play a significant role in scar tissue formation in injured hearts. However, despite their prevalence in the myocardium, research on their origins and functions is limited. Under the direction of Prof. Martin in the Biology department and Nicole Rubin, a PhD fellow at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, I was able to use the [ASP] funds to identify the cellular and acellular components of the myocardium through anti-body staining, transmission electron microscopy and scanning electron microscopy. As a kinesiology major, it was fun to observe the various mechanisms of these cells in an invertebrate model and apply them to the human heart pathophysiological mechanisms like myocardial infarction, high blood pressure, and congestive heart failure.

Taylor Rowland ‘13
Art History & Visual Arts
Mentor: Prof. Broderick Fox

Last semester was the first time I applied for an ASP Grant and was fortunate enough to receive it! I received funding for my short film, “Saving Face,” which I directed for my final junior seminar film. One of my actresses played a character that suffers from domestic abuse, so I also used the funds to pay my make-up artist who did a fantastic job creating bruises and cuts. More than anything else, the ASP Grant gave me the freedom to focus on other aspects of my project besides the finances. It’s difficult to make creative decisions, but the fact that I didn’t have to worry about feeding my actors or paying for make-up made the other decisions easier. I totally recommend that anyone apply for the ASP Grant. The application is straightforward and, if you receive your grant, is a great way to take pressure off yourself and really focus on the work you want to put forth.
ASP Conference Travel

If you're interested in presenting your research at a conference, the URC offers a limited amount of funding for presentation of academic project results. Modest conference fees and travel expenses may be covered upon application to the URC for presenting students. The work to be presented must have been completed while the student was enrolled at Oxy. ASP Conference Travel grants are limited to $50 to $300 per project and are not intended to be the sole support for any project. Limited funding for travel expenses is available and in order to make this opportunity available to more students, long-distance travel (including to the East Coast) is generally not supported.

The URC will provide limited funding for the SCCUR and NCUR conferences. These opportunities are publicized through the URC website, the URC facebook page, faculty, bulletin boards, newsletters, root, and e-mail.

The annual Southern California Conference of Undergraduate Research (SCCUR) is an opportunity open to students in all fields. This year's conference will be held on November 17th at CSU, Channel Islands. The URC will provide the conference fee for all student presenters and faculty mentors. Don't forget to use purchase order #oxy2012 when registering for the 2012 SCCUR conference.

The National Conference of Undergraduate Research (NCUR) may be partially supported by the College. Next year's conference will be held at University of Wisconsin, La Crosse on April 11-13, 2013. If you are interested in attending, check out the NCUR website cur.org/ncur_2013 for upcoming deadlines. Stop by the URC to sign up and for more information.

You must submit an application for support at least four weeks before the conference you wish to attend (the application must include documentation of your acceptance as a presenter). Requests for support to attend or participate in workshops, conferences, seminars, etc. will be considered on an individual basis.

Richter ASP

The Paul K. and Evalyn E. Cook Richter Trust has historically provided funds to support projects that involve independent research or study with a significant intercultural or international emphasis. The Richter-ASP projects will be smaller in scope than the traditional summer Richter Research Abroad awards (available through the International Programs Office). Richter ASPs provide funding for short-term travel to interview a particular population, observe natural or cultural events, or consult a specialized archive. Oxy does not approve travel to countries for which the US Department of State has declared a Travel Warning. Check their website for up to date travel warnings at travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html. This year we expect to make awards up to $1,000 each for research over winter break (Dec. 5, 2012- Jan. 22, 2013). The deadline for applications is 5:00 pm on October 26th. The URC anticipates announcing these awards by November 16, 2012.
Announcements!

Upcoming Deadlines

ASP Fall
October 12, 2012

ASP Spring
Early Decision: November 30, 2012
Regular Decision: January 25, 2013

Richter ASP
October 26, 2012

Science Scholars
November 9, 2012

John Parke Young Fund
For grants of less than $1,000
Rolling deadlines
For grants above $1,000
Winter Break: October 26, 2012
Summer: March 18, 2013

All applications are to be turned in by the deadline at 5pm to the URC Office

New Website
www.oxy.edu/undergraduate-research-center

The URC has a brand new website! Be sure to check it out for all the latest information on available funding, getting support, and new opportunities.

Don’t forget to list Occidental College and institution will pay by purchase order as form of payment! Use PO code: oxy2012

Visit the SCCUR website at sccur.csuci.edu for more information or stop by the URC Office in South Trailer C.

Contact Us!
The URC is located in South Trailer C next to Bell-Young.
We are open Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Phone: (323) 259-1414
Email: urc@oxy.edu
Website: www.oxy.edu/undergraduate-research-center
Newsletter Editor: Dorothy Gray

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