In the summer 2020 program, 89 students participated as members of the summer research cohort, selected directly by the SRP committee and/or by faculty/departments with access to their own funding through grants or endowments. Fifty-nine mentors representing 26 departments guided student researchers in their work. The average GPA of our participants was 3.6, and 15% self-identified as first-generation college students.

STEM projects remained the most popular subject of SRP projects with 47% of our research students majoring in a scientific field. 53% of our participants were evenly divided between social sciences (24%) and arts and humanities (29%). Oxy's SRP aims to have a balanced representation of majors; the heavy focus on scientific projects reflects current student research interests. Representation in the Arts & Humanities has significantly increased in the last few years and we highly encourage faculty in non-science fields to make sure their students know that summer research opportunities are available for students of all majors.

In previous summers the program would offer subsidized on-campus housing and in addition we hosted weekly plenary sessions, lectures, area group meetings, training workshops, and fun leisure activities which included gallery trips, a star gazing night and an evening at the Hollywood Bowl. Unfortunately, this year we were unable to offer those sort of group gatherings. For those that were residing locally we hosted a “Succulent Potting” social event for a few students. Thanks to Prof. Gretchen North (Biology) for providing the group with an on-line session on how to properly plant and care for succulents.

On August 3, 2020, the URC hosted the first ever Summer Research Virtual Conference and we were very proud of the 110 students who presented their work virtually. We were pleased to include UEP's twenty-one Affordable Housing, Food & Urban Agriculture and Public Health Interns. Researchers took the time to remotely prepare their work as a pre-recorded presentation to share with the Oxy community and made available for viewing on the 2020 SRP Conference website. We were excited to feature three division-specific live Zoom sessions the day of the conference. Students, mentors and Oxy community guests participated in these sessions. Sincere thanks to all of you who took the time to view the virtual presentations on the 2020 SRP Conference presentations and join live Zoom sessions.

The Undergraduate Research Center appreciates the support of our faculty mentors, members of the college Administration and other campus departments such as Facilities, ResEd, Campus Dining, Communications, IPO, ITS and Campus Safety.

The 2021 SRP has been confirmed to be a 10-week program with no decision yet on whether it will be a residential or remote program. We hope to release detailed information about the modified 2021 programming in December 2020. The deadline will be on February 8, 2021 by 5:00 pm (Oxy time!) with decisions announced in March, just prior to Spring Break. Students and prospective mentors should begin planning their projects during the fall term. Please note that in your discussions and planning with your mentor you should develop a contingency plan on how your research may need to be altered in order to be conducted in a remote environment where COVID-19 precludes most in-person activity. The application will have a place where you can demonstrate that this contingency plan has been prepared.

Don't forget! The URC is not just about summer! We also have funding for the support of academic projects and conference travel during the academic year. We highly encourage you to discuss the academic year opportunities with your mentor and should apply for ASP funding to conduct preliminary research in the Spring semester needed in preparation for your SRP project.
When I first came to Oxy in Fall 2019 I quickly discovered I had a deep love for formal philosophical discussion, particularly when applied to the reading of literary texts. Having been on a heavy STEM track through all of my English high-school, the eventual decision to declare Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture as my major felt pretty bold, at times even silly; I was making a deliberate decision to move from a functionally assured vocation to one that presented me with strange and unfamiliar challenges not just in its practice, but concerning all my future prospects with my degree post-graduation. Nonetheless, thus far, I haven’t regretted it for a second. The Summer Research Program was a very important first step for me in moving towards an actual application of my admittedly abstract interests, and experiencing what it would be like to eventually do any concrete, formalized work within this field. Moreover, as a kind of ‘trial run’ for eventually publishing some more long running and loftier project it was invaluable. I feel I have a much better grasp on the extended research process than I did before, and I feel much more capable of reading what are, at times, famously difficult philosophical texts, without an instructor directly on hand to direct my interpretation. That’s not even mentioning that I have now, by simple necessity, read more of these important works that I had before the program, that will go on to sharpen and better inform all subsequent work that I do within my major at the college and beyond.

So far as what I learnt about myself, it was mostly just confirmation. The program was genuinely a lot of fun. I grow ever more invested in the field I’ve chosen, and, having proven to myself that I can operate within it at a roughly professional standard, I am not a little excited about how my future career might ‘feel’, per se, if not yet exactly what it might look like. I am just a sophomore, after all.

I would truly love to do more Summer Research, and will certainly apply again, probably every year till I graduate. The research I did this summer had to a cut a couple of mostly decorative corners given the reduced length of the program and some difficulties with working within the unexpected remote format, and I would be really excited to go back and blow some of these ideas out into more fully-fleshed tangents to my general thesis capable of standing on their own as complete projects; a pseudo-naturalist analysis of neologism as language’s redeeming function from its own necessary entropy of habitual defamiliarization in un-grounded abstract signification (which I promise does actually mean something… I hope) was one such waypoint which I was truly sorry to have to pass over. This would be to my mind a continuation of the work I just did, if a little oblique to its main hypothesis. Besides, who doesn’t want to see a reading of Joyce that speculates on the importance of single words for pages and pages, deliberately to the point where they have entirely stopped making any sense?

Yes. Definitely yes. I would go as far as to say that I personally feel that anyone who doesn’t do any research at the college has missed a huge opportunity, that is if they’re not doing something else equally important to them. The program was a big commitment, and at times felt very demanding, but it was an even bigger achievement to eventually finish the project, and I am very proud that I did so. In parts it was immensely enjoyable, and were it wasn’t I was being stretched, not bored. Whatever summer job you usually have, I promise you this beats it every time.

Interested in learning more? Check out William’s SRP project here.
I would definitely recommend the SRP to other folks who are also interested in doing research. I especially encourage low-income students and BIPOC students to apply! Doing free labor, such as unpaid internships, is often not an option for folks who are of low-income background or are financially independent, and not having this work experience in your field can put folks at a disadvantage when it comes to post-grad jobs. This program serves as a great opportunity to gain experience and research something you are actually interested in and get paid. I hope to see more opportunities for students to share their progress, challenges, and success with other folks who are doing summer research. I think this would help build community within the program and allow for folks to help one another if challenges do arise.

The Summer Research Program allowed me to get a head start on my Senior Comps project. Being that I am a double major in Music Production and Urban & Environmental Policy, I knew my plate senior year would be pretty full as both majors have pretty extensive year-long comps. Being able to focus on my music comps in a more structured way, (and with compensation) was truly ideal for me. I was able to interview the manager of some of my favorite artists and her passion not only for her artists but also for the greater Latinx community ensured me that I not only wanted to work in the music industry, but also that it is possible to apply community organizing skills in the industry as well.

I am continuing my research for my senior comps and what I did for the URC definitely gave me a great starting point. Beyond that I am conducting research and working with the Mayor’s office on my senior comps project for UEP. The experience I had doing summer research definitely is helping me in knowing the best way to reach out to and communicate with folks for interviews.

I would definitely recommend the SRP to other folks who are also interested in doing research. I especially encourage low-income students and BIPOC students to apply! Doing free labor, such as unpaid internships, is often not an option for folks who are of low-income background or are financially independent, and not having this work experience in your field can put folks at a disadvantage when it comes to post-grad jobs. This program serves as a great opportunity to gain experience and research something you are actually interested in and get paid. I hope to see more opportunities for students to share their progress, challenges, and success with other folks who are doing summer research. I think this would help build community within the program and allow for folks to help one another if challenges do arise.

Questions about our research funding opportunities? Email urc@oxy.edu or schedule an informal, one-on-one Zoom chat with Karla Hernandez, the URC Department Coordinator. You can check her availability online and click on an open appointment slot to sign up. Make your appointment here.

Interested in learning more? Check out Brenda’s SRP project here.