



COUNCIL ON UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH

2024-2025 Elections

Undergraduate Research Programs Division: Division Representative Candidates

Position Purpose: The work of Divisions is done by Division Representatives who advance undergraduate research by providing networking opportunities, activities, and educational content. Their aim is to create and foster community and value within the organization. Representatives support the members of their division in activities and programs that align with the CUR strategic plan, mission, vision, and values.

Needed Qualifications:

- Capable mentor: Experienced guide and supporter of others looking to advance their personal growth and development in areas connected to but not limited to UR.
- Communication: Professional and effective communicators, experienced in difficult conversations and able to hear and disseminate community needs
- Collaborative Spirit: Team players making space for all voices to be heard, furthering the collective understanding of the group, and cultivating outcomes to best serve CUR and its membership

There are 16 individuals running.

You may vote for up to 8 of the candidates presented to be elected as representatives for this division.

Candidate information is presented on the following pages. Click on each candidate name below to be taken to their Information In the document.

- [Alexis Mathews](#)
- [Amy Childress](#)
- [Ashley Fricks-Gleason](#)
- [Christopher Fuse](#)
- [Dylan Gafarian](#)
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Alexis Mathews, Morehead State University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

a. I am the Coordinator of Undergraduate Research at Morehead State University (MSU), which means I oversee our Undergraduate Research Fellowship (URF) program and other aspects of undergraduate research. MSU's mission statement is about creating a community of lifelong learners by engaging in scholarship, promoting diversity of people and ideas, and fostering innovation, collaboration and creative thinking.

b. Our URF program, which allows students to earn an hourly wage, encourages students from all colleges and disciplines to engage in scholarship, facilitating projects that encourage inquiry and innovation. The diversity in topics and collaboration among students from various backgrounds, enhances the richness of ideas and perspectives, aligning with our commitment to inclusivity. In our URF program we have students engaged in projects that reflect our area of Appalachia. We have students in Biology who are engaged in research about lichens in Carter Caves, which is thirty miles away from our university. In the department of Communication, Media, Art and Design, we have two students who produced a documentary (a creative production) last year about being black in Appalachia, which showcases diversity in people and ideas.

c. Every April, we host our Celebration of Student Scholarship that allows students to share their findings with faculty, staff, and fellow students. All URFs are expected to present their work, but the event is open to all students engaged in scholarship, research, and creative productions. Awards are given out to students who earn 'merit' and 'exceptional merit', reinforcing the value of scholarship. Through organized workshops and get-togethers, I foster an environment that encourages creative thinking and collaboration among the URFs. These types of events are new to our program, but they've seen good results in getting the students to speak to others outside of their field, gaining fresh perspectives on the work they're doing.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

a. Morehead State, in eastern Kentucky, is a regional school; therefore, our students are predominantly white. I've been in my role for a short period of time and have been building the UR program from what little existed previously. This was made harder due to starting the position during the fallout from a cyber-attack that saw a lot of the UR content deleted. My focus had primarily been on working with our college deans to create processes for the URF program. However, because of the importance of diversity and inclusion, over the past year and a half, I've been taking opportunities to attend Webinars and talks about the promotion of diversity and inclusion in UR programs.

b. I have been working on marketing UR as much as possible. This includes sending out emails to every undergraduate student enrolled at the university. I have also started hosting information sessions for the students and faculty about UR. One of the things I make sure to do is include inclusive language in all the materials I create as well as the talks I give. I do intend to have more targeted outreach to underrepresented groups in the future.

c. In the spring, I partnered with our Office of Communications and Marketing to put together some interviews with a few of our URFs to help market the program. One of the students, an underrepresented minority from our Department of Communication, Media, Art and Design, produced a documentary exploring cultural identity within Appalachia. Clips from these interviews were included in a video that was included in the university's news release about our Celebration of Student Scholarship. The rest of the interviews haven't been released yet as the project is still ongoing. I have also been highlighting students and their projects on our office's social

media.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

- a) My current role offers a unique perspective that aligns well with CUR's charge. As part of the Center for Career Development and Experiential Education, which integrates high-impact practices and career services, I work in a highly collaborative environment. This collaboration has allowed me to foster connections that align with CUR's goals of expanding partnerships and supporting inclusivity in undergraduate research. Morehead State's Undergraduate Research (UR) program is open to all undergraduate, full-time degree seeking students, which requires me to navigate and engage with a wide range of disciplines and stakeholders. This cross-disciplinary coordination directly supports CUR's aim to "expand and enhance engagement" by making undergraduate research accessible to all. By understanding and navigating the needs of various fields, I can contribute to initiatives that resonate broadly across CUR's membership.
- b) My background in communication is another key asset. I prioritize clear, concise, and adaptable communication strategies tailored to various audiences, including students, faculty, deans, department chairs, and upper administration. Effective communication allows for smooth collaboration, effective dissemination of information, ensures inclusivity, and strengthens the sense of community central to CUR's vision.
- c) I also deeply value professional development. I frequently host workshops for students and play a central role in brainstorming and planning events. For example, I've developed workshops for students on several topics, including poster printing and communicating research to a general audience to engage and empower participants. I've also been developing a plan to host some workshops for mentors. This experience equips me to contribute innovative ideas for CUR workshops and activities that support its mission and members.
- d) Through my experiences acting as a liaison, organizing cross-disciplinary events, and aligning initiatives with strategic goals, I am excited to contribute to CUR's mission. I aim to help foster a vibrant, inclusive community that reflects CUR's values and enhances undergraduate research opportunities.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Amy Childress, Purdue University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

I have spent over two decades in the promotion, expansion, and mentorship of URSCI. I have participated in nearly every role during my academic and professional career: undergraduate researcher, mentor, program administrator, and university administrator. I currently serve as the founding director of the Purdue Office of Undergraduate Research, a central campus resource to promote and expand URSCI for students, faculty, and staff. I strive to build and foster collaborative relationships across the university system and with key stakeholders to coordinate, design, and execute initiatives in alignment with university priorities of transforming undergraduate education and expanding experiential learning opportunities. I work closely with the evaluation of inclusive UR and mentorship practice and institutional reporting. A challenging yet highly rewarding part of my responsibilities include advocating for UR initiatives and aligning financial resources to increase access to URSCI for students across all disciplines. And I am extremely fortunate to work with a wonderful team of dedicated professionals with similar commitment to all things URSCI-related. It's a great day when we see first-hand evidence – hosting one of our three annual research conferences, sending grant notifications, reading a grateful email – that our efforts have made a difference in the lives of students and mentors.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

An ongoing goal for me is to increase access to URSCI for undergraduates, particularly students who have traditionally lacked access to this high-impact practice. What is important in developing an equitable and inclusive environment, and building those relationships, is creating open, transparent communication. There is a hidden curriculum within higher education, consisting of unspoken rules and norms for academic, social, and organizational activities, that lacks formal recognition or communication. I view it as my responsibility to give back to others through similar mentorship that has benefited me and to dismantle hidden norms that disadvantage individuals who are not part of the majority.

I help to promote diversity and inclusion through a number of initiatives that focus on mentorship, programming, and reporting. I am part of the leadership team for CURE – Purdue, which provides professional development and ongoing support for instructors to develop and implement their own course-based undergraduate research experience (CURE). Any student can choose to enroll in a CURE. The inclusion of research in coursework, particularly within introductory or required courses, reduces issues of unconscious biases in the selection process and the hidden curriculum. Another initiative has been the First-Year Investigator program. I secured the funding and helped design this offering. This URE was a much-needed program addressing the rising demand from first-year students while providing access to critical research skill development with necessary support structures to help ensure the success of these individuals. The aim was to create a diverse and supportive community of learners. A third initiative is creating a database of URSCI participants. We cannot know how well our interventions are working to increase diverse participation and support inclusive practices if we do not have a starting point.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

I am excited at the possibility to expand my participation to promote undergraduate research through CUR. I have been involved with the CUR community for several years and have grown immensely through these contributions. My engagement has ranged from presenting multiple talks at virtual and in-person conferences, helping to plan the annual conference for 2020 (which, unfortunately, was moved from our campus to a virtual format), and serving on the current Program Review Task Force. I will provide the same enthusiasm to representing the URPD as I do to promoting undergraduate research engagement on campus. I use transparent communication so that my actions and decisions are clearly understood. I operate with empathy and respect as a way to understand the needs and interests of various stakeholders. I find that establishing an open environment built on mutual respect and understanding promotes innovation through idea creation and problem solving by incorporating information from others and building on them or bringing them together. I have integrated these values into my work and would bring this mindset to the URPD.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Ashley Fricks-Gleason, Creighton University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

I joined Creighton University in June as Director of the Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (CURAS). Prior to this, I spent 11 years on the faculty at Regis University and was the founding Director of their Undergraduate Research, Inquiry, and Scholarly Engagement Program. My passion for undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry (URSCI) stems from my own experience as a first-generation college student whose research project changed the trajectory of their vocational journey. As a result, my primary focus has been to increase access to undergraduate research opportunities by intentionally designing programs that promote inclusivity. At Creighton we are cultivating a community for the curious by challenging our undergraduates to engage in research that matters. We are committed to centering opportunities for URSCI as a hallmark of a Creighton undergraduate education. CURAS plays a pivotal role in facilitating these experiences across all schools and colleges at Creighton. As Director, I am committed to supporting broad disciplinary participation, lowering barriers to ensure that all students have access to these high-impact opportunities, and incorporating additional professional development opportunities for both our students and our faculty mentors. True to our Jesuit mission, CURAS embraces a wholistic approach to mentoring our students through the process of vocational discernment. In my role as Director, I work closely with our CURAS student ambassadors to build relationships across campus, administer internal grant opportunities that support undergraduate research and conference travel, oversee our concentration in undergraduate research, design and deliver workshops to support our undergraduate research community, and advocate for the critical importance of undergraduate research to various stakeholders. My success in this role is directly attributable to the support and training I have received from CUR over the years, and I am eager to give back to this exceptional community by serving as a division representative.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

Increasing access to URSCI opportunities is one of my deepest passions. I began my career as an Assistant Professor of Neuroscience and, due to my own lived experiences as a first-generation college student and woman in STEM, found myself immediately drawn to serving our most marginalized student populations. My commitment to building a more inclusive research environment is what spurred my interest in creating the Undergraduate Research, Inquiry, and Scholarly Engagement Program at Regis. That program and, in particular, the Undergraduate Research Certificate were born from my experiences mentoring undergraduates. I was truly fortunate at Regis to work not only with STEM majors, but also first-generation students. It was through my work with the First Scholars program that I initially identified the need for a scaffolded entry point into mentored research. In collaboration with my students, we built an Undergraduate Research Certificate designed to meet the needs of populations often excluded from research by providing structured training, support services, and community-building opportunities. Recognizing that tangible supports, such as monetary compensation and access to deeply discounted summer housing, are vital to creating equitable access to URSCI opportunities, I have fiercely advocated for policy change and engaged in significant grant-writing to build capacity in these areas. In my first six months at Creighton, I have prioritized data collection and assessment to evaluate the equitability of our existing programming and to support plans for growth in this space. As a first step, I have partnered with the Success Center, TRiO Student Support Services, the Division of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and the Center for Faculty Excellence to co-create professional development

programming for both undergraduates and their faculty mentors. By integrating with other engaging and high-impact opportunities, we are increasing accessibility and championing opportunities that are rooted in equity and inclusivity.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?.

I am a passionate advocate for URSCI and understand the transformative power these opportunities provide for our students. I am equally dedicated to supporting and championing the faculty mentors who are engaging students in this work. As a result, my academic leadership style is centered on relationship-building. In my time as director of undergraduate research across two different institutions, I have engaged in strategic planning, program development, data analytics, program assessment, grant writing, faculty development, community engagement, and public education. I have built partnerships and nurtured relationships across campus and collaborated with numerous offices and faculty from all disciplines. It has, without question, been the most rewarding work of my academic career. I am deeply grateful for the mentorship I have received along the way, much of which has come from CUR colleagues. I have been an engaged member of CUR for 5 years, attending the annual NCUR and ConnectUR meetings, participating in professional development sessions such as the Biology Division's MIRIC initiative, engaging in trainings such as Grant Dialogues and Scholars Transforming Through Research, and have benefitted deeply from conversations with colleagues in the Undergraduate Research Programs Division. In fact, it was conversations with other directors at ConnectUR in 2023 that solidified my decision to seek out a full-time director role. The community that has been built in this division is truly remarkable. I firmly believe that we ought to give back to the programs that have nurtured and sustained us, which fueled my interest in serving CUR as a Division Representative. I welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the other representatives in this division to develop unique programming, networking, and service opportunities to best serve our members and I genuinely look forward to helping serve CUR in this role.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Christopher Fuse, Rollins College

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

As an astronomer at a small liberal arts institution, my professional focus has been centered on providing students with hands-on research opportunities across a range of astronomical topics. At Rollins College, where the mission is to foster lifelong learning and responsible leadership, undergraduate research is essential in achieving these goals. I believe that research is not only a high-impact educational practice but also a core element of teaching at the most fundamental level. Through my work, I have seen firsthand how undergraduate research transforms students, equipping them with critical thinking skills, a sense of ownership in their learning, and the ability to solve complex problems.

I am deeply committed to advancing undergraduate research and have had the privilege of directing Rollins College's collaborative research program for the past 13 years. In this role, I have worked to expand student participation, increase financial support for research initiatives, and promote research, scholarship, and artistic endeavors across all academic departments.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

As a scientist and educator with an invisible disability, I bring a personal understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion—not only within undergraduate research but also within the broader academic and community contexts. Throughout my career, I have worked to foster inclusive environments by participating in a college-wide bridge program aimed at helping underrepresented students transition into college through research opportunities. Additionally, I have overseen programmatic changes to the Rollins College Collaborative Research Fellowship program, to better serve a growing and increasingly diverse population of undergraduate researchers.

I am committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of background or ability, have access to the transformative opportunities that undergraduate research provides. As a CUR representative, I would continue to advocate for improving diversity and inclusion. I am especially mindful of working to make gains at smaller institutions where resources and support systems may be more limited.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

In my role as director of an undergraduate research program at a small liberal arts college, I have had the privilege of working with faculty and students across multiple disciplines. The lessons I've gained from directing a college-wide research program translate directly to the collaborative community of CUR. At a small institution like mine, insights from faculty at larger universities or those with differently structured research programs are invaluable in helping to strengthen and expand undergraduate research opportunities.

We know there is no single solution to a problem—often, the most innovative and creative results come from drawing on a variety of perspectives. This is the purpose of the CUR community, where we bring our diverse experiences to help promote undergraduate research, scholarship, and artistic inquiry. This exchange of ideas is exactly the kind of community CUR fosters.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I previously served as a Representative for the Physics & Astronomy Division, an experience that was both enriching and rewarding. One of the highlights of my time as a representative was the strong camaraderie and collaboration among my fellow representatives. Whether meeting in person or virtually, these gatherings provided a valuable opportunity to learn from others and exchange ideas—many ideas which I applied to my own department.

During my tenure, I was particularly proud of our work in providing awards to support students attending conferences and conducting faculty-mentored research. In addition to my role as a division representative, I also served on the Nominations Committee, where I helped identify and encourage colleagues to run for open representative positions. This experience allowed me to connect with a diverse group of professionals in my field.

Overall, my time as a CUR Division Representative was an invaluable experience that not only expanded my network but also strengthened my passion for advancing undergraduate research. I am eager to continue building on this work and contributing to the Undergraduate Research Programs Division.

Dylan Gafarian, Farmingdale State College

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

At Farmingdale State College, my involvement in undergraduate research aligns closely with the institution's mission of delivering a comprehensive education that integrates practical learning experiences with scholarly growth. Central to this mission is fostering student engagement in research as a means of equipping them with critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world skills that are transferable across professional fields.

One of my core responsibilities is developing programs and initiatives that facilitate meaningful research experiences for undergraduates. Through the Research Aligned Mentorship (RAM) program, to which I serve as the Director, I work to pair students with faculty mentors, helping them navigate the research process, develop key competencies, and establish professional networks. This program directly supports the college's aim to make research accessible to a diverse student body, particularly for first-generation and underserved students, who benefit from personalized guidance and opportunities to engage in applied research early in their academic careers.

Additionally, I develop and execute the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI), where we design immersive research projects that foster collaborative learning and build a community among students and faculty. This experience strengthens students' understanding of research methodologies and prepares them for both graduate studies and careers that require advanced analytical skills.

Further, as I develop key performance indicators (KPIs) for undergraduate research at Farmingdale, I focus on measuring student outcomes and program effectiveness to ensure alignment with institutional goals. These metrics help identify areas of growth, increase accountability, and ensure that our initiatives remain impactful and sustainable.

Overall, my involvement reflects Farmingdale's commitment to creating an environment where research and experiential learning are core components of the educational experience, preparing students to be knowledgeable, engaged, and adaptive in a rapidly changing world.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

At Farmingdale State College, my efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI include creating supportive pathways for underserved students, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds and first-generation college attendees. Through my collaboration with TheDream.US, a scholarship awarded to undocumented college students, I have been able to facilitate access to research opportunities for DREAMers, ensuring that students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status and similar backgrounds have equitable access to mentorship and funding. This work involves securing local research opportunities with specific funding allocations to support these students, reducing financial barriers and allowing them to fully engage in research activities without additional economic pressures.

The Research Aligned Mentorship (RAM) program is a program which is designed to ensure that students from underrepresented backgrounds are not only matched with mentors but also given resources tailored to their unique challenges. This mentorship program is enhanced by inclusive training for faculty, focusing on cultural responsiveness and the need to support diverse students holistically. I also help guide these students toward research projects that resonate with their communities, fostering a sense of relevance and purpose in their academic work.

Additionally, I prioritize building partnerships with local organizations and businesses, establishing research opportunities that are both accessible and meaningful for these students. By aligning research themes with community-focused topics, students from TheDream.US and other underserved populations find greater connection and motivation in their work. These local partnerships also enable me to secure financial support, making it possible for students to conduct research without incurring personal costs.

Through these initiatives, I work to ensure that URSCI at Farmingdale remains a welcoming, inclusive environment, supporting students of all backgrounds in their pursuit of academic and personal growth through research.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

With my extensive experience in developing and promoting undergraduate research initiatives, I am well-equipped to advance the charge of CUR Division Representative by fostering a supportive, collaborative environment aligned with CUR's strategic goals. My work at Farmingdale State College has involved building networking opportunities and facilitating programs that engage a diverse group of students and faculty in research. This experience has honed my skills in connecting people across disciplines and creating inclusive research spaces that prioritize accessibility and relevance.

My role running the Research Aligned Mentorship (RAM) program, launching the Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI), and developing the IGNITE Symposium, a yearly display of students scholarly research, applied learning, and creative endeavors, has provided me with a strong foundation in organizing and leading initiatives that support students' growth. I have developed partnerships with local organizations, established funding resources, and created workshops that empower students from various backgrounds to succeed in research. This background prepares me to identify and implement activities that meet the needs of CUR members while promoting community and professional development.

Additionally, my work with TheDream.US and creating research opportunities with dedicated funding demonstrates my commitment to inclusive research practices. This aligns well with CUR's mission and values, as I am adept at creating research paths that are both meaningful and accessible for underserved students. I bring skills in strategic program development and assessment, allowing me to contribute effectively to CUR's long-term goals by continuously evaluating and enhancing divisional activities for impact and inclusivity.

As a CUR Division Representative, I would leverage my background to support members through networking, educational content, and programs that cultivate community, align with CUR's mission, and ensure that undergraduate research is a valuable, inclusive endeavor for all.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Gabriela Chavira, California State University Northridge

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

Since 2022, I have been the lead principal investigator of a National Science Foundation (NSF) HSI STEM grant to increase undergraduate research infrastructure through the creation of a STEM undergraduate research office, ESTUDIO. ESTUDIO served as the catalyst for establishing a centralized Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) for all undergraduate students at California State University Northridge (CSUN). Aligned with the university's strategic plan, as the inaugural Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), I apply an equity lens in the development of programs and initiatives to increase the high-impact practice of undergraduate research.

Over the past decade, I have been a principal investigator and co-director of student training for BUILD PODER, funded by the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS). In this role, I developed and implemented an undergraduate research training program that provides culturally responsive undergraduate training in biomedical-related sciences. I used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and other equity-minded frameworks to engage 350 undergraduate minoritized students, primarily of Latinx descent, in preparation for doctoral studies through year-long faculty-mentored research. As the Director for OUR, all the training developed for BUILD PODER is being adapted for all undergraduate students.

Over the past 20 years as a developmental scientist and professor of psychology at CSUN, I have trained and mentored over 30 master's level and 60 ethnically minoritized undergraduate students in research examining the factors contributing to the well-being and achievement of immigrant youth in the US. Most of the students I mentored are first-generation college students from low-income communities, so it was important to mentor them as 'professionals-in-training.' This resulted in over 90% of the master's students and nearly 70% of undergraduate students enrolling in graduate training (MA/MS, PhD), many of whom are now assistant and associate professors across the Southwest.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

Throughout my career, I have used equity-minded and asset-based approaches to mentoring. My research lab has served as a counterspace for students from racially and ethnically minoritized communities in a discipline that has resisted to diversify. CSUN is a Minority-Serving and Hispanic-Serving Institution, and in psychology, over 60% Chicano/Latino student enrollment, I was the only Chicana (or Latina/o/x) faculty member for nearly 12 years (now I am 1 of 7 Latinx faculty). I felt that it was important to prepare students to thrive, not just survive the structural racism that persists within the academy. I use Yosso's Cultural Community Wealth Model (CCW) to empower students to use their lived experiences to change the face of science. I apply this same method in the development of the Office of Undergraduate Research, and as the director, I am able to provide effective evidence-based training (created and implemented in BUILD PODER) in increasing students' awareness, interest, and participation in research and creative scholarship preparation for graduate studies or careers in their respective disciplines. I have co-authored 10 articles on how ethnically minoritized youth navigate academic pathways, and 13 articles using a critical approach to training undergraduate students in undergraduate research and faculty members to be culturally responsive mentors.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

I see myself more as a team player and organizer than a leader. Creating a supportive community for undergraduate students to be successful researchers is important. My experience as the BUILD PODER program director for student training will help contribute to CUR activities, training opportunities, and initiatives. In addition, my skills in developing and implementing undergraduate training curricula for diverse undergraduate students will allow me to bring a unique insight into effective (and not-so-effective) strategies, activities, and initiatives. I am eager to provide insight from my experiences and contribute to the success of CUR and its membership.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Jacqueline Jones, Troy University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

At Troy University, I have been deeply engaged in advancing undergraduate research, aligning with the institution's mission to promote intellectual inquiry, personal growth, and community service. My contributions include mentoring undergraduate students through hands-on research experiences, fostering their development as critical thinkers and future leaders in the sciences.

As a faculty member and Director of the Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program, I have designed and taught research-intensive courses such as Genetics and Molecular Biology. These courses incorporate investigative learning, where students engage in experimental design, data analysis, and presenting findings. I also supervise independent research projects in areas such as cancer biology and molecular genetics, which often result in national conference presentations or publications.

In addition to traditional mentorship, I strategically work with undergraduate students to provide grant writing experience, offering them opportunities to contribute to the competitive grant process. This collaboration has led to securing grants with students as Co-Principal Investigators, exemplifying my commitment to empowering students while aligning with Troy University's emphasis on academic and professional growth.

I am also a Faculty Mentor for the NSF LSAMP program, which supports underrepresented students in STEM disciplines. This initiative underscores my dedication to fostering diversity and inclusion within the research community. My commitment to undergraduate research has been recognized through awards such as the Chancellor's Distinguished Faculty Research Award and the CUR Society Faculty Mentor Award.

Undergraduate research is a cornerstone of student development and a vital component of Troy University's mission. It empowers students with practical skills, critical thinking, and purpose, preparing them for success in graduate programs and professional careers.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

Promoting diversity and inclusion in Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Inquiry (URSCI) has been a central focus of my work. My recent NIH grant submission addresses critical health disparities and strategically incorporates both undergraduate and graduate students into the research process. This ensures that students from diverse backgrounds gain hands-on experience while contributing to impactful projects that address societal inequities.

In addition, as the Project Director of a recently awarded GAANN grant, I have developed a pipeline program that creates seamless pathways for undergraduate students to transition into graduate-level research. This initiative emphasizes mentorship, funding opportunities, and research experiences, particularly for students from underrepresented groups, fostering their development as future leaders in STEM and biomedical fields.

By integrating DEI principles into grant-funded projects and establishing programs that provide equitable access to research, I am committed to creating inclusive opportunities that empower students and advance the mission of URSCI.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

As a faculty member, mentor, and program director, I have developed skills that closely align with the charge of a CUR Division Representative. My extensive experience in undergraduate research, grant writing, and program development positions me to effectively foster community, provide educational content, and support division members in alignment with CUR's mission and strategic plan.

I bring a proven track record of creating networking opportunities and professional development initiatives. For example, I have mentored undergraduate students in research projects that resulted in national conference presentations and publications. These experiences have equipped me to connect individuals with resources and networks that enhance their academic and professional journeys.

My background in securing private and public/government grant funds, including NIH and GAANN awards, demonstrates my ability to develop programs that align with CUR's strategic goals. These grants have funded initiatives that incorporate undergraduate and graduate students into research pipelines, expanding access and opportunity for underrepresented groups. I have also collaborated with students as Co-Principal Investigators on grant proposals, ensuring that they gain valuable experience in research and funding processes.

Additionally, my leadership roles at Troy University, such as Chair of Biology, Project Director of the GAANN grant and Director of the Biomedical Sciences Program, have prepared me to support division members effectively. I am skilled in building collaborative environments and fostering a sense of belonging, which are central to CUR's mission and vision.

Through these experiences, I am confident in my ability to advance undergraduate research as a CUR Division Representative, creating a vibrant and inclusive community that reflects the values of the organization.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Jana Weiner, United States Air Force Academy

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

As the Assistant Director of Research Curriculum and Programs, I oversee the Cadet Summer Research Program, coordinating opportunities for over 300 cadets each year to engage in 3- to 6-week research projects with both government and civilian sponsors. This program not only expands cadet exposure to real-world research but also cultivates essential skills that align with the Academy's mission. Additionally, I work to integrate research across the curriculum, enhancing the development of critical thinkers who can apply engineering problem-solving, scientific reasoning, and principles of science to real-world challenges. My work also emphasizes the importance of understanding the human condition, cultures, and societies, while fostering leadership, communication, ethics, and respect for human dignity—fundamental qualities that define the Airman and Guardian ethos.

I also support the activities of 24 research centers at the United States Air Force Academy, providing faculty and cadets with unparalleled opportunities and resources to conduct research that directly contributes to advancing national defense and security priorities.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

We acknowledge that research takes different forms for social science majors compared to STEM disciplines. To ensure broad participation, we allocate summer research opportunities across all departments, making research accessible to students from various fields of study. In addition, we are committed to identifying funding sources specifically for social science majors, recognizing that their departments often face more limited financial resources. Furthermore, we value the benefits of research for all students, including those who may not meet the typical GPA requirements. To support these students, we have established a waiver process that considers applicants who demonstrate genuine interest in research and have the endorsement of faculty, ensuring that every student has an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to scholarly work, regardless of their academic standing.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

The Air Force Academy is widely recognized among the U.S. military service academies for its leadership in advancing both procedural innovation and academic rigor. I am confident in my ability to contribute significantly to the advancement of undergraduate research, not only within our esteemed institutions but also in collaboration with our public and private counterparts. I look forward to engaging with peers, sharing our successes, and broadening opportunities for presenting scholarly work in the field of undergraduate research.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I have not previously worked as a Division Representative.

Joy Goto, California State University, Fresno (Fresno State)

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

During my time at Fresno State, I've had the privilege of serving as the faculty co-coordinator for the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program alongside Lilia De La Cerda, Director of CASA, LSAMP, and HCOP. This role has been one of the most fulfilling research mentoring and leadership experiences of my career. LSAMP, supported by the NSF, is part of a national effort to support STEM students, and our program at Fresno State has positively impacted thousands through peer mentoring, academic workshops, and guidance toward Ph.D. pathways.

Since 2019, I've served as the campus PI for the NSF Bridge to Doctorate grant, leading Fresno State as the host campus for the CSU-LSAMP alliance. Through this initiative, we mentored 12 exceptional M.S. students across diverse STEM disciplines, fostering their academic and professional growth. These programs are critical not only for advancing STEM education but for supporting the broader academic community, including working professionals and students nationwide.

In my 17 years as a faculty member, I've mentored 58 graduate and 47 undergraduate students in independent research projects, culminating in their presentations at local, national, and international forums such as CCRS, SACNAS, and the Society for Neuroscience. These interactions, whether through guiding research or celebrating student achievements, have been the most rewarding aspects of my academic career.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

California State University, Fresno (Fresno State) is one of 23 campuses in the CSU system. Our campus is designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) and Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI). I have worked with hundreds of our undergraduate research students who are a part of our LSAMP, and most recently as PI of (last 3 years) our Department of Education McNair program. I have helped to promote diversity and inclusion as an active PI in these programs. In addition, I have helped to organize 'Research Week' at Fresno State for the last two years and our Central California Research Symposium. These events and programs have served many of our undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds. My active role in these events and grants is my passion and I hope to share these ideas with our CUR membership.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

My experience organizing events, workshops, symposia, panels, and programmatic grant-related activities all around undergraduate research and mentorship have been a part of my career as a now tenured full professor at Fresno State. In the last 8 years I have served as department chair (chemistry and biochemistry), and most recently as the interim dean of research and graduate studies. These leadership roles have prepared me to now share my experience and organizational skills at a broader level. I would love the opportunity to share my skills with others and with this I believe I can successfully uphold the charge of the CUR Division Representatives.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I have not previously served as a Division Representative, but I am eager to be involved.

Karen Rodriguez'G, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

As Director of the Illinois Office of Undergraduate Research for the past 5 ½ years, my goal is to make undergraduate research an important component of the “Illinois experience” and serve as a national model of excellence. Aligned with and advancing Illinois’ land-grant commitment to transformative learning, innovative research, and scholarship with global impact, my office’s strategic priority is to democratize access to research and empower undergraduates to explore, discover, and create by providing resources and support, and creating inclusive opportunities. We work to ensure all undergraduate students have equal access to and take part in authentic research experiences through curricular and co-curricular collaborations with Illinois faculty, staff, students, and other community partners. Our current 5-year strategic plan is organized around three pillars: Innovation, Collaboration, and Advocacy.

Through program, curricular, and resource development, we create and support high impact research experiences for all undergraduate students, and work to ensure equal access to such experiences through targeted programs, workshops, outreach events, and personalized advising to ensure students know how to navigate the research enterprise. Although we are a central campus office, our staff is small and we ‘live and die’ essentially through continued development of internal and external partnerships and collaborations. Some examples are our Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program, Faculty Undergraduate Research Toolkit, Humanities Research Labs and other CURE models, Aspiring Researchers Alliance, First-Gen Scholar Program, Research Ambassadors, Research Opportunity Fairs, and our Undergraduate Research Week & Symposium).

We also lead assessment efforts: (1) gauging effective) institutional practices to be of use in student recruitment, engagement, retention, alumni and corporate donor relations, and campus and system strategic planning; (2) better understand the impact of the undergraduate research experience on the trajectory and success of a student from the 'start' of their undergraduate career to post-graduation; and (3) impact on faculty.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

At my institution, my office’s strategic priorities are organized around our mission to democratize access to undergraduate research opportunities and resources. This includes understanding diversity/equity/inclusion as diversity of experience, disciplines and opportunity, as well as demographic diversity, including first-generation and non-traditional students.

We are doing this in several different ways, guided by intent to provide more high-quality engagement with students: (1) Demystify academic research culture and break down barriers through CUREs. We have so far developed multiple highly successful CUREs (e.g. our Humanities Research Labs), with the intent of developing a larger campus structure. (2) Direct student engagement through workshops, peer mentoring, meetings with faculty and staff, and thoughtful and intentional promotion. To increase direct interactions with students we’ve developed a highly successful and impactful suite of workshops that support students throughout their research journey at Illinois (100+ per academic year). We also now have a request portal where departments, student groups, etc. can request tailored workshops (25+ per AY). Additionally, we offer a significant number of one-on-one meetings with both staff and our Ambassadors (who purposefully represent a diversity of experiences and

majors on our campus). (3) Collaborations/partnerships that support creation of sustainable programs, courses, and other structures to increase access to, equity/inclusion, and quality of research experiences on our campus. These include collabs with our Grad College (Apprenticeship Program), Office of Minority Student Affairs (First-Gen Scholars), the Humanities Research Institute, New Student & Family (Research Showcase), and the College of LAS/Grainger Engineering Research Opportunity Fair where we particularly are targeting and supporting underserved/underrepresented students, including pre-fair workshops that prep students for participation.

Finally, at most every engagement with students, I introduce myself as a first-gen, nontraditional student, and how my own experience as an undergraduate researcher significantly changed my life, personally, academically, and professionally.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

Over the course of my now 10+ year career engaged with undergraduate research and researchers, I have developed significant expertise in working with internal and external stakeholders in program and curriculum development, establishment of best practices, and assessment of impact on students, mentors, their institutions, and their community(ies) (local, regional, national). At the core of this experience – with its successes and challenges – are the myriad relationships I've developed along the way. Community really is the key -- people like myself who are passionate about fostering, supporting, and advocating for undergraduate research and creative inquiry and the often life-changing experience it is for students and their institution. BUT equally important is engaging with those who are unaware, or skeptical, and the opportunity to inform, educate, and advocate for the benefits of URSCI for everyone involved. I have been privileged to be able to do that through my first term as a Division Councilor (now Representative) for the Undergraduate Research Program Division. With my URPD colleagues I have, for example, workshoped and presented on (ConnectUR) partnering to build and sustain URSCI at the institutional level, and applying strategic foresight to progress in undergraduate research. I have also provided (and will continue to provide) individual and communal support through serving on the Advocacy Committee, and programs like our new URPD Exchanges which look to share best practices and more importantly provide a network of people, ideas, and resources around topics like engaging 1st year students in research, AI and undergraduate research, establishing a URSCI research advisory committee, and founding and supporting an undergraduate research journal.

I look forward to the opportunity to serve another term in support of advocacy and undergraduate research, my colleagues, and CUR, whether as a URPD Representative or as part of the larger CUR community.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I have been privileged to serve on the CUR Foresight Guidance and Resource Development Advisory Group for the last year. The Group was tasked with guiding and educating CUR leadership in leveraging foresight in its strategic planning. The foresight process starts with thinking expansively about possible forces that may impact the organization over the long term (10+ years), and these are identified as drivers of change (social, technological, economic, environmental, and political aka STEEP).

The Committee worked the last year identifying those key drivers of change and important to the mission and membership of CUR – Uncertainty in Higher Education, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Reworking Career Pathways – and developing multiple sets of future scenarios (possible, preferred, probable, plausible).

Based on this work, we held a workshop at ConnectUR 2024, where participants developed a basic understanding of the concept and process of foresight, gained knowledge on our identified drivers, and

identified tools to select drivers of change that could impact their own work in URSCI. We've also created a guide for the Board (also to be shared across CUR) 'Mapping Possible Futures: Using Foresight to Frame CUR's Priorities and Planning.' The guide is designed to support groups within CUR in adopting foresight thinking, and jump-start its use. Currently under development and discussion is more tailored discussions and support for CUR divisions, and further work with the Board in using foresight in the next strategic plan.

I have found this work highly gratifying both in terms of thinking about strategic goals and future planning for my own institution but as important in support of CUR's mission and its members and the support of and advocacy for undergraduate research – how does one think ahead 10 to 15 years in terms of possible, probable, plausible, and preferred outcomes?

Keri Swaby, Virginia Tech

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

My academic career started at Virginia Tech almost 15 years ago when I was hired to build an interdisciplinary research and academic program from the ground up. I navigated the decentralized, siloed academic landscape by establishing enduring relationships and partnerships that continue to be a critical component of my success now as Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR), a role I have held for the past 10 years. In this role, I support the university's mission and current Quality Enhancement Project focused on increasing student access to experiential learning, specifically undergraduate research, and embedding it in the curriculum. I am responsible for operational oversight and strategic planning for the Office, which serves more than 30,000 undergraduates and supports more than 2,500 faculty members. Despite our small office size of three, we have proven to be very effective by collaborating and partnering with other offices to leverage expertise and expand our capabilities to advise students, and offer a variety of training, funding, and presentation opportunities.

I work tirelessly to try and increase funding that supports students engaged in research across disciplines. I have designed and secured funding for five unique research programs, including our new first year program which attracted almost 400 applications this semester and a biotechnology research program for more advanced researchers launching this summer. These programs increase available research opportunities but are not enough to meet demand, so several years ago, I advocated for a program to provide faculty with funding to develop creative programs and interventions that scale undergraduate research and increase access for all students. To date, this program has supported 36 unique projects which continue to impact students. Currently, I am working on identifying and designing appropriate support and guidance for faculty who develop CUREs across disciplines.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

My personal mission is to remove barriers to research for students from all backgrounds and to create accessible and inclusive opportunities throughout a student's undergraduate career.

At the systems level, I regularly interrogate our practices and procedures to ensure that accessibility and inclusion are assured in all we do.

I constantly advocate for funding to support individual research opportunities. I recognize the real limit in this traditional apprentice approach, so I am in the process of launching a large-scale effort to expand CURE offerings, with a plan to provide centralized guidance and support to faculty. My hope is that by increasing the availability of curricular and paid opportunities, we can remove the financial barrier for students and make undergraduate research more accessible and inclusive for all students.

Programmatically, I designed and managed two programs explicitly aimed at increasing access to research for underserved and underrepresented populations. Our first-year research program provides research opportunities for students who would not otherwise have that opportunity and removes the fear and uncertainty of finding a mentor by directly matching students to projects. Another program for more advanced

researchers aims to increase diversity in research, as represented by the individual student researcher or their research area, and provides students with supplementary mentoring from an acclaimed faculty member.

Personally, I served on the steering committee that designed our First Generation Living and Learning Community. I actively support students engaged in research as part of the Black Men Excellence Network and I partner with the Multiculture Academic Opportunities Program to offer summer programming for visiting researchers every summer. Recently, as part of an HHMI funded effort, I worked with colleagues from three other institutions to offer virtual training, support, and community building for underrepresented students from each institution attending conferences, including NCUR, for the first time.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

I have been a member of CUR for over 10 years and have attended numerous workshops, including CUR dialogues, a CUR Institute, and ConnectUR (previously CUR Biennial), as an attendee and as a presenter. I am Treasurer for the Network of Undergraduate Researchers in Virginia (NURVa), a grass roots organization of research directors from across the Commonwealth of Virginia, with the goal of forming a community of support, providing joint programming, and increasing visibility for undergraduate research. In this role, I have secured grant funds to support two annual events- a statewide research conference (I serve on the conference planning committee) and the upcoming Undergraduate Research Showcase in Richmond, modelled off CUR's prior Posters on the Hill. Educationally, I have served as moderator for the STEM session of a virtual panel discussion hosted by NURVa on engaging undergraduate researchers post-covid and supported a virtual presentation training session offered to students in preparation for NURVa's virtual conference that year. I think that I have a breadth of relevant experiences that support undergraduate research administratively and educationally and I would bring these skills to the URP division.

Working as a program director at a large public land grant institution that is fiscally conservative, I have gained valuable experience running a small and under-resourced office that serves an entire campus. I respect and understand policies, but I have learned when to be creative and how to leverage expertise and support from collaborators across campus to make things happen. What I love most about the CUR community is its genuine openness and its members' willingness to share ideas and best practices without ego or ownership getting in the way. If elected, I will serve as a trusted peer, actively listening to concerns of division members while sharing my own experiences, frustrations, and creative solutions.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A.

Lisa D. Brown, Morgan State University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

Two of Morgan State University's (MSU) primary goals are to enhance student success and well-being and to advance the University's standing to an R1 (Very High Research Activity) doctoral research institution. Recognizing that undergraduate research plays a critical role in achieving these objectives—and understanding the importance of training and supporting students early in their academic and research careers—MSU established the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) in 2020. Now in its fourth year, OUR remains committed to its clear and achievable mission of empowering undergraduates to engage meaningfully in research. As the Inaugural Director, I have implemented a range of initiatives designed to promote and support faculty-mentored scientific, entrepreneurial, and creative inquiry across the MSU community. Specifically, OUR:

1. Offers a dedicated space and opportunities for students to exchange ideas, acquire essential research skills, and develop independent research projects.
2. Ensures that research experiences are accessible, fostering an inclusive environment where all interested students can participate.
3. Establishes partnerships, programs, training sessions, and workshops tailored to emerging researchers.
4. Collaborates closely with MSU departments and key academic and organizational partners, guiding students to identify their research niche and successfully navigate their scholarly endeavors.

Through these efforts, OUR not only supports MSU's commitment to student development but also contributes to the University's broader vision of becoming a premier research institution.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

Morgan State University, classified as a Historically Black College and University, provides instruction to a diverse student body encompassing multiple ethnicities, races, and nationalities. Prior to the establishment of the Office of Undergraduate Research, most research opportunities were concentrated in STEM disciplines. Recognizing the need for broader engagement, we have since expanded our support to include the social sciences and public health. Looking ahead, we intend to extend these opportunities further, incorporating the arts to foster creative inquiry and ensure that research experiences are accessible to students from all academic backgrounds.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

My background in research mentorship, program coordination, and community-building equips me well to uphold the responsibilities of a CUR Division Representative. With strong organizational and communication skills, I can connect faculty, students, and other stakeholders in a way that fosters robust networks and meaningful collaborations. From planning workshops and online forums to sharing best practices and emerging strategies, I will ensure a steady flow of educational content that resonates with diverse audiences. Additionally, my experience working within multidisciplinary teams will help me serve as a bridge between new and experienced scholars, promoting inclusive dialogue and engagement. By actively encouraging participation, recognizing innovative student research, and spotlighting valuable resources, I am confident I can enhance the sense of community within the division. Ultimately, my efforts will align with CUR's strategic plan, mission,

vision, and values—empowering members to pursue excellence in undergraduate research and strengthening the broader research ecosystem.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

In addition to actively representing by attending the majority of monthly meetings and participating in the annual ConnectUR conferences, I have recently become involved with the AURA committee. I am currently serving as a co-chair, with the goal of transitioning into the Chair position in the near future.

Matthew James Vechinski, Virginia Commonwealth University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

I have been named Associate Faculty Director of Virginia Commonwealth University's Quality Enhancement Plan, recently approved by our accreditors, called RAMPS: Real-world Applications in Multidisciplinary and Project-based Studies. As a faculty member of the Department of Focused Inquiry with experience teaching sophomore-level general education research seminars for over 10 years, I was invited to help design this project centered on increasing opportunities for research-supportive project-based learning, before stepping into this leadership role last summer for the pilot of our first offering of RAMPS courses in Fall 2024. My work over the next five years will emphasize faculty development and program assessment. In addition to my teaching, I am the Coordinator of Academic Programming for my unit, overseeing a student-staffed study space (the Focused Inquiry Learning Lounge, or FILL) offering resources and a mentoring program for students in Focused Inquiry courses which introduce incoming undergraduates to question-based exploration of social issues, information literacy, and the research process. UR is not only an institutional priority at VCU; my work and the work of colleagues invested in UR aligns research with a commitment to student success. We stress experiential learning and real-world experiences for undergraduates to increase student belonging and career readiness as well as academic achievement.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

The RAMPS program, referred to informally as "Every Ram's a Researcher," is designed to increase undergraduates' access to URSCI opportunities at VCU by embedding project-based learning in the general education curriculum. Our goal is to introduce students early to the scholarship taking place on our campus to inspire and prepare them to take advantage of the university's experiential learning offerings such as community-based research, faculty and peer mentoring, social entrepreneurship, and vertically-integrated projects. We know that participation in these transformative learning experiences leads to greater retention and degree completion while preparing students for the workplace of today. This we want for all students, not just those fortunate to have the resources and connections. VCU is an urban, minority serving institution with a third of its students being first generation, and at the same time is an innovative R1 university. My work in Focused Inquiry and now my work with RAMPS aims to provide the foundation for all students, regardless of preparation or purpose, to succeed and become career ready. My commitment to equity motivated me to share knowledge and insights even more widely to open doors to URSCI opportunities in all corners of higher education. I recently completed writing Original Inquiry, a research guide for first- and second-year undergraduates which will be published next year with the Broadview Press.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

My job as Coordinator of Academic Programming involves providing resources to faculty and undergraduates to make the university a welcome and stimulating space for all. My experience providing events and workshops will serve me well as a CUR Division Representative. I will stress that the programming that I organize is always co-designed and co-facilitated with others with direct experience and expertise pertaining to the topic at hand. I aim not only to educate and impart information but to create community and foster holistic wellness as well. I turn away from framing programming as remedial or enrichment and instead focus on providing tools that

empower. I remind my peer mentors that sometimes what others need is not direct help or knowledge but a space to be heard and reinforcement that builds confidence. Resources don't just come in links and slides; they can be innovations like providing therapy animals and sleep pods, which we do for our Focused Inquiry students. Finally, the best programming is not imposed by one person but arises organically from discussion and collaboration—and the assessment of previous efforts. I strive to be a good listener to identify what engages others, rather than assuming that I know what they want better than they do. While I'm relatively new to CUR and might have less experience in the organization than other candidates, I'm pushing myself to jump into the deep end. I'm emboldened because my skills and values are such a good fit and will allow me to have a positive impact on the division's culture.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

N/A

Orlando Ayala, Old Dominion University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

I joined the Engineering Technology Department at Old Dominion University (ODU) in 2013. Although our department does not offer a graduate program, junior faculty were expected to conduct research at a level comparable to departments with graduate programs. I adapted quickly, continuing my foundational research in computational fluid dynamics of disperse flows. To date, at least one-third of my publications have been led by undergraduate students, with the remainder from external collaborations. Additionally, I have advised three student organizations: Engineers Without Borders (EWB), the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) Baja Club, and the ODU Makerspace Student Board.

With EWB, I supported students in designing a water distribution system to provide clean water to homes in a community in Guatemala. Under my guidance, the SAE Baja students have significantly improved their competition standings, advancing from around 60th place to consistently placing in the 20th to 30th range out of over 110 competitors. I also helped the ODU Makerspace Student Board build the makerspace from the ground up, establishing successful student-led and student-run operations.

Given my success in mentoring undergraduates, I was recently appointed as Director of Undergraduate Research for the institution. As a prominent public research university that recently achieved R1 Carnegie research status, ODU aims to provide undergraduate students with research-focused experiences that deepen their interest in a field of study and foster connections with a diverse community of peers and faculty. We believe that engaging undergraduate students in faculty-supervised research not only motivates them to persist toward their degrees but also increases the likelihood that they may continue their education at the postbaccalaureate level.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

As an American born in Venezuela who came to the United States 26 years ago, I cannot overstate the importance of diversity and the need to be mindful of including everyone in all aspects of life. I deeply value diversity, particularly in fields like engineering, which should mirror the rich and varied makeup of our society. Progress throughout history has often come from embracing our differences. It is crucial to listen to and consider all perspectives, as each viewpoint is shaped by unique backgrounds and experiences. Embracing diversity means welcoming, respecting, and encouraging these differences. To achieve this, every member of our community must feel fairly treated (equity) and included (inclusion) in all aspects of their professional lives.

I continually reach out to students from diverse backgrounds, encouraging them to participate in extracurricular activities, including those I lead and/or support. The students who join my research projects and the organizations I advise come from a variety of backgrounds; a fact made even more possible by Old Dominion University's vibrant, diverse student population. Of course, reaching out to students from different backgrounds is supported by an ongoing commitment to self-reflection and awareness of possible unconscious biases. I continually work to foster a truly inclusive environment.

Beyond bringing together a diverse group of students, I actively share the successes that arise from working with diverse teams and highlight the importance of diversity and inclusion. Until recently, I served as part of the Faculty Diversity Leaders at ODU, a role I stepped back from due to new responsibilities, though I continue to support the group and its mission.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

In my role as Director of Undergraduate Research at Old Dominion University (ODU), I am responsible for developing and implementing a comprehensive plan to build a robust undergraduate research program. This experience I am earning directly aligns with CUR's charge for Division Representatives to advance undergraduate research by fostering community, providing networking opportunities, and delivering meaningful programming.

Drawing on my background in mentoring a diverse group of students and leading multiple student organizations, I have developed strong skills in creating inclusive environments that encourage collaboration and innovation. These experiences have taught me the importance of accessible and diverse networking opportunities, which I aim to enhance within CUR by connecting members across disciplines, institutions, and regions.

My skills in strategic planning and program development will enable me to effectively contribute to CUR's goals by supporting division members in initiatives that align with CUR's mission, vision, and values. I also look forward to learning from others in this role, as one of the most rewarding aspects of engaging with organizations like CUR is the opportunity to both help others—something I am passionate about—and grow alongside them.

I am confident that my skills in mentorship, strategic program development, and inclusive community-building will enable me to support CUR's charge, enhance the value of CUR membership for all, and advance undergraduate research across our institutions.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I have not served a previous term as Division Representative. I am looking forward to doing so.

Sophie Pierszalowski, University of Washington

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

I have overseen central offices of undergraduate research at two large, research-intensive institutions, Oregon State University and the University of Washington. In both of these positions, I have provided the intellectual leadership and short- and long-term strategic development toward building a stronger, more equitable infrastructure for undergraduate research. In addition to navigating the responsibilities inherent in running offices of undergraduate research (e.g. developing and overseeing large-scale research programs, running campus-wide research symposium), I have created new programs and initiatives that support the mission of each campus.

Most notably, I have dedicated considerable time to studying and developing tools for effective and inclusive mentorship of undergraduates in research. For example, at the University of Washington, I developed a new campus-wide workshop series and certification program for undergraduate research mentors, highlighting the importance of equitable mentoring strategies. At Oregon State University, I developed a new graduate-level course called Methods in Undergraduate Mentorship. I also worked to incentivize and recognize effective and inclusive mentorship by developing three high-profile campus-wide awards for excellence in undergraduate research mentoring. Supporting effective and inclusive mentoring is critical at large, research-intensive institutions where faculty are under high pressure to secure grants and publish their scholarship. While stretched thin, faculty recognize that supporting undergraduates is central to each institutions' mission. By developing resources like these, I have been able to provide faculty with well-deserved recognition and easier access to tools to mentor effectively and inclusively.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

First, I have developed and implemented several large-scale, equity-based undergraduate research programs. For example, in 2014, Oregon State University was awarded a 1.5-million-dollar NSF grant to establish the STEM Leaders Program, an undergraduate research program designed to enhance the success and retention of students from underserved groups. I was hired to develop and facilitate the program for three years. Effective implementation led to huge successes; over the course of three years we had placed 144 first-year STEM students from underrepresented groups into paid research experiences across campus. The average first-year college completion rate was around 90% during the years I ran this program, which was higher than the OSU average first-year completion rate for all students (~84%). Second, I have overseen offices of undergraduate research at two large, research-intensive institutions. Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion has been at the heart of my work in these roles and I have been intentional about infusing equity-based practices into programmatic and administrative aspects of these offices. In 2020, I published an article called "Research Experiences for All Undergraduate Students? Building a More Equitable and Inclusive Office of Undergraduate Research at a Land-Grant Institution" that highlights this work. Third, I have promoted diversity and inclusion in URSCI by strengthening and implementing training opportunities for mentors of undergraduate researchers, with a focus on mentoring students from underrepresented communities. For example, I received a national fellowship with the Center for Advancing Research Impact in Society (ARIS) to develop an open-access guide for effective and inclusive mentoring, "Mentoring the next generation: Using undergraduate research to

broaden engagement & impact in STEM.” I have facilitated training sessions and workshops for faculty, post-docs, and graduate students at various institutions using this tool as an equitable mentoring framework over the past several years and have published several articles about the importance of equity-based strategies in undergraduate research practice and mentorship.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

My career with URSCI started in 2014, when I was hired to run a large-scale, early career undergraduate research program for transfer students, first generation college students, and students from racially minoritized groups. Since then, I have overseen two central offices of undergraduate research at research intensive institutions; facilitated several equity-based undergraduate research programs; managed multiple campus-wide showcases of URSCI; supported the development of new grant-funded research opportunities; developed an equitable and inclusive mentorship certification program; and published several articles on the scholarship related to these practices.

All of these activities have been strengthened by partnerships with colleagues who support URSCI. In 2019, I developed a new initiative at Oregon State University called OSU’s Research for Undergraduates Network (RUN). RUN served as a strong network of support for undergraduate research mentors and those who facilitate undergraduate research programs. The group met weekly for over a year to discuss challenges related to URSCA, including liability, virtual practices and compensation. This model was so successful that we published an article outlining how colleagues at other institutions can create a similar community of practice, “Communities of Practice in Academic Administration: An Example from Managing Undergraduate Research at a Research-Intensive University.” This effort points to the value I place on networking, collaboration, and community building - all of which are central to CUR’s charge.

In addition to working with supportive colleagues at my home institution, I have regularly collaborated with CUR colleagues in various capacities, including publications (e.g. COEUR 2.0), CUR conference presentations, pre-conference workshops, CUR critical conversations, and CUR custom institutes. Proactively seeking collaborations with colleagues across the country has given me important new insight across all of my work. I look forward to continuing to foster and support these critical partnerships and building new ones within the CUR community.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

I have served as a Division Representative (previously called Division Councilor) since July 2019. I have remained active within CUR since 2019. Below are some examples of my most recent engagement with the CUR community:

- I am currently serving an 18-month term as co-chair of CUR’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee.
- I contributed to CUR’s Characteristics of Excellence (COEUR) 2.0 by writing a case study for how my team has implemented these characteristics in arts and humanities programming.
- I presented four times at the 2024 ConnectUR conference, including the virtual plenary session, an extended pre-conference workshop, an oral presentation, and a conference workshop.
- I offered two separate six-hour CUR online intensive sessions with CUR colleagues, Buffie Longmire-Avital and Jenny Shanahan, called “Centering DEI: Practical Tools for Sustaining Transformative Racial Equity in Undergraduate Research Programs.”

- I co-hosted with CUR's Executive Officer, Lindsay Currie, a session called "Undergraduate Research Experiences as Broader Impacts Activities" during the NSF-funded Advancing Research Impacts in Society, Office Hours Series on 6/10/21.
- I have facilitated or planned several CUR sessions hosted by CUR's DEI committee, including, "Moving from promoting diversity to promoting anti-racism in undergraduate research spaces" on 3/2/21 and "Critical Conversations with the CUR Council" on 10/16/20.
- I hosted a session called "Leveraging the ARIS Fellowship Program to develop an interactive roadmap for inclusive undergraduate research mentoring" during the CUR Dialogue, Connecting you to Funding and Grants, on 2/12/21.
- I hosted a CUR institute for Webster University to help motivate early and/or mid-career faculty to consider how their URSCI activities contribute to student learning with CUR colleagues, Anne Boettcher and Karen Resendes in April 2021.
- I have supported work within the Engineering Division by serving on the awards committee and by volunteering for division-related responsibilities.

Stephanie Ramos, Oregon State University

Undergraduate Research Programs Division Nominee

NOMINEE STATEMENTS

Please comment on your involvement in undergraduate research activities in the context of your institution and its mission.

At Oregon State University, my involvement in undergraduate research aligns closely with the institution's mission of promoting academic excellence, fostering student success, and encouraging innovation. As Associate Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research, I have played an integral role in shaping initiatives that provide equitable access to research opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds, particularly those who are underrepresented in STEM fields.

One of my key responsibilities has been managing the URSA Engage program, which connects first- and second-year undergraduates, as well as transfer students, with faculty mentors to foster early involvement in research. This program not only supports the university's goal of advancing knowledge through experiential learning but also contributes to student retention and graduation rates by helping students build meaningful academic and professional connections.

My efforts in undergraduate research align with OSU's mission of creating a transformative student experience, one that emphasizes access to high-impact educational practices. By fostering an inclusive and accessible research community, I help empower students to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills that prepare them for successful careers and lifelong learning.

In what ways have you helped promote diversity and inclusion in URSCI?

One of the key ways I have promoted diversity is through the successful institutionalization of the STEM Leaders program, which was initially grant-funded and is now in its tenth year. This program specifically recruits historically underrepresented students in STEM fields, including students of color, first-generation students, and transfer students. By collaborating with faculty who are committed to equity, we create a supportive research pathway that offers opportunities to students who might otherwise lack access to them. I also advocate for equitable selection processes, ensuring that students are chosen based on their potential and passion for research rather than solely on academic history. This approach helps level the playing field, giving more students the chance to engage in high-impact research experiences. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, my goal is to foster a research culture that empowers all students to succeed, contribute meaningfully to their fields, and pursue careers in research and innovation.

How do you anticipate your skills will help successfully uphold the Division Representative charge?

With over a decade of experience in higher education, I have successfully developed and implemented programs that provide equitable research opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. My role in managing initiatives such as the URSA Engage program and institutionalizing the STEM Leaders program has given me a deep understanding of how to create networking opportunities and educational content that align with CUR's mission to promote inclusivity and access to undergraduate research. These programs have allowed me to collaborate with faculty and administrators to ensure that students, regardless of background, can thrive in research settings. I also have extensive experience in building partnerships and fostering community, both across institutional divisions and within faculty-student networks. I regularly organize workshops, seminars, and

mentorship activities aimed at helping students develop research skills and build connections with peers and faculty. These efforts align with CUR's goal to provide networking and educational opportunities, and I am eager to bring this same approach to help support CUR members. Additionally, my ability to communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders—students, faculty, and administration—will help me actively contribute to advancing CUR's strategic plan, mission, and vision. By leveraging these skills, I am committed to helping division members access resources, build strong research communities, and create lasting value within CUR.

If you have served a previous term as Division Representative (previously Division Councilor), are there any particular contributions during your previous term(s) that you would like to highlight?

During my previous term as a Division Representative, one of the contributions I would like to highlight is my role in facilitating a pre-conference workshop. This experience allowed me to engage directly with participants, fostering discussions around best practices in undergraduate research and helping to build a collaborative atmosphere that aligned with CUR's mission. The workshop provided an opportunity to share resources, network with peers, and support faculty in advancing their own undergraduate research initiatives. In addition to facilitating the workshop, I actively participated in and attended various meetings, ensuring that I remained engaged with the division's goals and initiatives. Through these meetings, I contributed to important discussions on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in undergraduate research and provided feedback on strategic initiatives. I also consistently connected with colleagues to support division activities, helping to align our efforts with the broader CUR mission and values.