Undergraduate Research Award (URA) Faculty Recommendation Information

"*The faculty members who review applications for Undergraduate Research Awards are strongly influenced by the depth and enthusiasm of the mentor's letter of support.*"

- Vin Grabill, Chair, URA Selection Committee

Faculty support submissions are requested by the same deadline as completed student applications.

All students applying for URA funding must have a faculty mentor who provides a recommendation for the student. Faculty recommendations may be very brief, although a more specific, extended letter is much more instructive to the committee and inspires confidence that the student will receive ongoing guidance throughout the research period. The committee values information about the student's knowledge of the field to be studied, commitment to conducting research, and preparation for the specific project proposed. Faculty assurance that the project is feasible is also helpful. More information on the faculty letter of support can be found on the URA Forms page.

Faculty letters of recommendation are submitted separately and confidentially by the faculty member and are not provided to the students.

Faculty mentor responsibilities include:

- Guide the student through the process of submitting research projects to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), if necessary.

- Supervise, mentor, and support the student throughout the research year.

- Support the expectation that the student participate in URCAD. Review and approve student's URCAD abstract. (For those students who have graduated or who are engaged in overseas study, participation may be via video, email, or other method.)

- Review and approve the final report the student submits at the conclusion of the research year.

- Direct the student to report any problems with completing the project or any change in the student's status at UMBC to the office of Undergraduate Research and Prestigious Scholarships.

- Arrange for a colleague to mentor the student if you become unable to do so.

This information is provided to assist faculty members in writing strong letters of support for students applying to the URA program: http://ur.umbc.edu/ura/ .

What matters most:
- You are committed to coaching and developing the student to assure project success.
- The student is proposing a do-able project given current resources and student abilities.
- The project is important and adds to the body of knowledge in the field.
- The student has completed appropriate course work and literature review for this work.
- You know the student well enough to know that he or she will be able to accomplish this.
- The budget is logical and appropriate to the project.

Special circumstances:
- **A GPA under 3.0:** If you believe the student can complete the project and be academically successful in spite of a low GPA, please include some information on this for the committee.
- **Laboratory-based work**: The student should have experience in the lab or your assurance that the student will stick to this project once he or she experiences the reality of laboratory work.
- **Funding for travel:** Please confirm that this travel is required for the project. Could the work be accomplished via books, Internet, telephone, or e-mail?
- **Funding for an educational experience** such as a workshop in acting or research: Clarify how this will help the student to complete an independent research or creative project.
- **A student graduating in Dec.:** Confirm that project and final report can be completed in time.
- **A part of a larger team effort:** Make clear what the student's independent work will be.
- **IRB approval will be needed**: Confirm that you will help the student through the process.
- **A survey instrument will be used:** Provide assurance that a valid instrument is available and that the student has or will have appropriate training to use the instrument.

Also important:
- You have read the student's finished proposal and are comfortable that
  - The student's application itself is clear and well written.
  - The student description and the mentor description of the project are congruent.
  - The student describes appropriate quantitative and/or qualitative methods.
- Consider not writing a letter of support if
  - You don't feel you can write a strong letter for this student and this project.
  - You will not have time to appropriately mentor the student during the upcoming year.
- For more advice, contact:
  - Your department chair or a colleague who has successfully mentored URA recipients
  - A URA committee member http://ur.umbc.edu/ura/committee/
  - URA Committee chair Vin Grabill, grabill@umbc.edu
  - URA staff Dr. April Householder aprilh@umbc.edu