



Psychology Division Newsletter

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Would you like to contribute an article to this newsletter?

If so, please contact the Editor,
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From the Desk of the Chair

Dr. Susan Larson, CUR Psychology Division Chair



When April arrives, about a month before my school year ends, I begin creating a pile of summer reading which includes many books, articles and magazines that I haven't got to or know that I won't get to during the academic year. I eagerly anticipate taking advantage of my more leisurely summer schedule for reading and reflection. If you are also preparing a summer reading list, I might encourage you to include on it one of the most recent CUR publications, a monograph titled, *Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research (COEUR)*.

This monograph includes an article outlining characteristics of excellence in undergraduate research, which is meant to serve as a guide for those who wish "to build, evaluate, and maintain robust, productive, meaningful and sustainable undergraduate research programs" (COEUR, p. 2) [Full disclosure: I was fortunate to be able to work on this document with fellow CUR councilors, Roger Rowlett, Chemistry, and Linda

Blockus, Undergraduate Research Program Directors.] The document summarizes best practices that support and sustain effective undergraduate research environments; it is aspirational and it is meant to provide guidance for those who work with undergraduate research as they aim to provide excellent undergraduate research experiences. Recommendations come from CUR's collective experience; examples include:

- An institution that values undergraduate research as a high-priority activity that is integral to its educational mission will provide clear, tangible forms of recognition for faculty and students (COEUR, p. 9).
- Institutions that strive for excellence should recognize and embrace opportunities to combine undergraduate research with other engaging experiences (COEUR, p. 13).
- Departments and programs should design cur-

ricula that expose students to skills necessary to undertake undergraduate research, and curricula should be designed in ways to facilitate faculty and student involvement with undergraduate research (COEUR, p. 14).

- Institutions and programs of excellence will have multiple approaches to assessment to recognize successes, illuminate gaps, and collect benchmarking data. Assessment plans should be appropriate for the context and purposeful in design (COEUR, p. 18).

Following the COEUR article are responses from 18 individuals who have long been involved with undergraduate research at their own institutions. These responses provide additional guidance for making use of COEUR and for creating excellent undergraduate research experiences.

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From the Desk of the Chair (continued)

Dr. Susan Larson, CUR Psychology Division Chair

CUR hopes that this resource will be valuable to all its members as they seek to develop strong undergraduate research programs. If you haven't yet seen it, please find it at the following link: http://cur-design.idevdesign.net/assets/1/23/COEUR_final.pdf and consider making it a part of your summer reading list.

On an altogether different note: this is my last member communication as chair of the psychology division. It has been my pleasure to serve in this role over the past four years and I look forward to continuing my involvement with CUR in other ways. **I wish to extend a very warm welcome to Bob Rycek who will begin serving as our next division chair in June of this year.** Bob has been an active and engaged CUR Councilor and strong supporter of undergraduate research for many years and I look forward to working with him as chair of our division.



On behalf of all of us in the Psychology Division of CUR, we wish to sincerely thank Susan Larson for her tremendous leadership during her time as our Chair. Thank you Susan!

Photo of the Psychology Division councilors from the Annual Business Meeting in St. Louis, Missouri (June, 2011).



**14th Annual CUR
Conference
June 23-26, 2012
Hosted by The College
of New Jersey**

**Leveraging Uncer-
tainty: Toward a New
Generation of Under-
graduate Research**

The subthemes for the 2012 CUR National Conference are as follows:

- Research Transcending Historic Disciplinary Boundaries
- Sustaining Undergraduate Research in an Era of Fiscal Uncertainty
- Online Technology in Undergraduate Research: Possibilities, Threats and Challenges
- The Challenges and Opportunities of Undergraduate Research in a Broad Global Context

For more information, please visit the conference website at: <http://www.cur.org/conferences/tcnj/cur12Natconf.asp>

More information about the conference location can be found at: <http://www.tcnj.edu/>

**Travel Tips & Local
Insider Information
for the Conference**

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Air Travel:

If you plan to fly to the CUR conference, the Philadelphia and Newark airports are about equidistant to the conference location. If you plan on visiting New York City, Newark is super convenient and public transportation between these two cities is simple.

Note that an hour travel time from the airport to the conference location is a good estimate. Try and avoid rush hour if possible by avoiding arrival at either airport between 6:30-7:30 a.m. and 4:30-5:30 p.m.

Bringing the Family:

If you are thinking of bringing family, He Len definitely recommends a car. There are few restaurants or attractions within walking distance and public transportation to and from the college is not convenient. There is decent food on campus (TCNJ has an award-winning dining hall!). There are no restaurants on campus but there are plenty of restaurants within 5-10 miles of campus.

Visiting with Kids:

There are lots of places locally that would appeal to kids but having access to a car would be important. Many local attractions are listed on the CUR website. In addition, He Len also recommends:

Sesame Place
<http://www.sesameplace.com/sesame2/>

Longwood Gardens (PA)
<http://www.longwoodgardens.org>

and

Terhune Orchards (NJ)
<http://www.terhuneorchards.com/>

Thank you He Len for your travel tips!

**14th Annual
CUR
Conference**

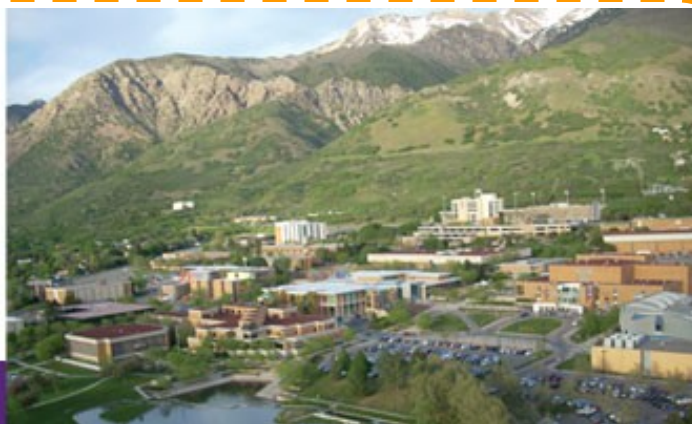
**June 23-26,
2012**

**The College of
New Jersey**

Ewing, NJ



MARCH 29-31, 2012



The National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) promotes undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity in all fields of study.

The annual conference gives undergraduate scholars in all fields and from all types of institutions of higher learning a forum to share the results of their work through posters, presentations, performances and works of art.

This year was a great success for psychology at NCUR!

To see the full program of oral presentations and posters, see the NCUR website:
<http://www.weber.edu/ncur2012/dropdowns/program.html>

One benefit of presenting at NCUR is the opportunity for students to publish their work in the conference **Proceedings**, produced annually by the University of North Carolina at Asheville and distributed to institutions across the nation.

All student presenters at the conference are invited to submit manuscripts for review by the Proceedings Board.

You can find out more about the NCUR Proceedings by visiting the University of North Carolina at Asheville's website which is found at <http://urp.unca.edu/proceedings-national-conference-undergraduate-research>

CUR Posters on the Hill Highlights

In April, the 2012 annual CUR Posters on the Hill session was held on Capitol Hill. This exciting—and well-attended—event hosted 82 undergraduate researchers who shared their research findings with Members of Congress and their staff. This year's event boasted an impressive roster of Members of Congress who not only met with visiting students in their offices during the day, but came to see their posters and meet their fellow undergraduate researchers in the evening reception. This year's reception honored a number of legislators committed to science and research, including former Member of Congress, Bart Gordon, who received the Honorary CUR Fellows award. Linking undergraduate research experiences with a highly skilled labor force, CUR was honored to have Dr. Adriana Kugler, Chief Economist for the Department of Labor, provide remarks acknowledging the importance of undergraduate research and the contributions it makes for a career-ready workforce. The event showcased the tremendous impact of undergraduate research experiences in the lives of college students across this nation and the students and their impressive work were the best advocates for federal dollars for such opportunities.

Interview with Dr. Bob Rycek

Incoming Division Chair



The members of the psychology division of CUR are delighted that Dr. Robert F. Rycek is willing to serve as the next chair of our division. Bob is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Nebraska Kearney. He received his B.A. in Psychology from the University of Illinois, Chicago and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Northern Illinois University. Bob has been the recipient of many teaching and research awards at the University of Nebraska Kearney. In addition, he is the Founding President of the Nebraska Psychological Society and has been an active member in many professional organizations, including CUR. After having spent the past 9 ½ years in part or full-time administration as Associate dean, Interim Dean, and Department Chair, Bob exited the dark-side and returned to full-time teaching and research in January. To introduce Bob to our members, I asked him a few questions about himself and his plans for our division.

You were trained as a Developmental Psychologist. Is this still your area of research interest in psychology? Have your research interests changed over your career?

I still continue to pursue various interests in the area of developmental psychology. Specifically, I am interested in adolescent and young adulthood thinking especially adolescent egocentrism. Being in various administrative roles has hampered those research interests somewhat, but I am working on re-engaging that work now that I'm back as full-time faculty. Aside from developmental psychology work, I've also developed an interest over the years in pedagogical issues, especially undergraduate research and student engagement, and have been able to do work in that area while balancing administrative duties. Finally, as I have become a more seasoned faculty member, I have become more of a generalist within developmental psychology which has served me well in working with undergraduates and their research interests... we've done projects on a whole host of topics including attachment, parenting styles, self-esteem and self-concept to name a few.

Given your involvement in teaching, other professional organizations and administrative duties, you have a very busy schedule. How do you manage to make time for undergraduate research? Why do you think undergraduate research is important?

At UNK we have built undergraduate research into the curriculum by developing optional labs in many of the upper-level content courses. Each student must take two optional labs to graduate which often involves an independent research project (either individually or in small groups) as part of the lab experience. I teach the optional lab in developmental psychology every Fall and therefore usually have from 3 to 7 students that I will work with on these primarily student-designed and driven studies. The nice thing is that once the semester is over, the research is most often continued and usually fine tuned for presentation at a regional student conference such as the Great Plains Students' Psychology Convention. In addition, students may continue to expand these projects into further independent research studies. Because of this, our department has been able to develop a culture of undergraduate research in which the students have expectations that they will do some research.

I've been a strong advocate of undergraduate research since I began my professional career almost 30 years ago. Perhaps the reason for this is my own experiences with my undergraduate research mentor, Dr. Gersh Berkson, at an institution where, at that time, undergraduate research in psychology was fairly rare. I would not be where I am today had it not been for that mentoring relationship and it has been my desire to pass on that unique relationship to future generations of students. There is nothing more rewarding than watching a student grow through the research experience.

Undergraduate research can be challenging and rewarding. Given your focus on undergraduate research in your career, what tips or strategies can you share that have worked for you?

First and foremost, I am blessed to be at an institution that values and is committed to undergraduate research and provides resources to faculty and students in support of that endeavor... so my first bit of advice is do your best to foster a supportive environment for undergraduate research. That's easier said than done but a good place to start is within your own department... then you can work on the dean and others. As a former dean, I know the value of undergraduate research for an institution – being able to showcase student research is a big plus.

(continued on page 6)

Secondly, there are a lot of different models out there for doing undergraduate research that range from highly structured faculty-led research to loosely defined student-led research and all places in-between. To be an effective mentor, I think you have to find what situation best suits you. For myself, I get excited about some of the ideas the students come up with and then try to find a workable methodology to study it. The research may not be earth shaking, but I try to focus on the process of doing research as the students learn how to go about asking questions, designing studies, and carrying them out. And sometimes, we come up with some interesting findings.

As you embark on your new role as our psychology division chair, what are your thoughts about what priorities should be important for this division?

First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Susan Larson who has done a great job these past years as Division Chair... she will be a tough act to follow. I see the role of the Psychology Division of CUR as advocates and facilitators. The division has some very talented councilors who are very active and successful in undergraduate research... in one sense, trying to tell them about the importance of undergraduate research is preaching to the choir... on the other hand, there are institutions and faculty out there that are struggling to develop undergraduate research programs and could use the talents and creativity of our councilors to assist in that endeavor. This might include developing strategies to foster undergraduate research as well as ways to work with the current resources and identify ways to develop new resources. That's where I think CUR does an excellent job and we in the psychology division could be most useful. I think that CUR plays an important role in enhancing the undergraduate research experience across many disciplines... it has had a tremendous impact on my institution and has been a great resource for us. On many campuses, psychology tends to be a leader in undergraduate research especially in the social sciences. I think that the role of the Psychology Division of CUR should be to spread the undergraduate research experience.

A second area that we still don't do a real good job at is assessing the benefits of undergraduate research. In these times of shrinking budgets and resources, the focus on assessment by accrediting agencies, and cries for accountability from various private and public sectors, it is important that we be able to demonstrate the value of the undergraduate research experience - not just for the students that go on to graduate school.... but for all students. I think that CUR is in the position to do that and psychology could clearly be the leader in that endeavor.

You are a very busy person. Are you involved with any activities or hobbies unrelated to your work? If so, how do you find the time to participate in these activities?

My wife and I love the mountains (that's why we live in Nebraska) and many of my hobbies and activities center around the outdoors. We love to travel and camp, in fact we have three separate major camping trips planned for this summer including Canyonlands in Utah, a rather remote spot in Northern Colorado, and the Black Hills in South Dakota. Camping feeds one of my other hobbies which is photography... mainly wildlife and landscape... and you can't take good photographs unless you hike to various places so I would have to add that to the mix. In addition, every Spring break we head to Steamboat for downhill skiing which is another favorite activity. For casual reading I enjoy historical biographies - currently I'm reading a biography of Mark Twain and I dabble a bit in oil painting *ala* Bob Ross.

Are there any other comments that you would like to share with our members?

In closing I would just like to say that I have enjoyed working with the CUR Councilors over the years... the few days we spend together each June have been both fun and productive. I look forward to working with all of you in the future.



www.cur.org

The Council on Undergraduate Research, founded in 1978, is a national organization of individual and institutional members representing over 900 colleges and universities. CUR's mission is to support and promote high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship.