

SIUE URCA program celebrates extraordinary mentors and students

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA) program is recognizing excellent mentorship and student work through four awards.

The URCA program encourages, supports and enables students to participate in research and creative activities at the undergraduate level. URCA Associates work one-on-one

with faculty mentors to lead their own research projects or creative activities. URCA Assistants work on faculty-led research or creative activities to gain a hands-on introductory experience.

The fall 2017 Vaughn Vandegrift URCA Research Mentor of the Semester Award was presented to Maria Kontoyianni, PhD, associate professor of pharmaceutical sciences in the SIUE School of Pharmacy.

Brigham Dimick, MFA, area head of drawing in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Art and Design, was honored with the URCA Creative Activities Mentor of the Semester Award.

"All URCA Assistant faculty mentors have to "try out" each semester, and it is not uncommon to receive well over 100 faculty applications for 80 funded positions," said Laura Pawlow, PhD, URCA coordinator and professor in the Department of Psychology. "Dr. Kontoyianni and Mr. Dimick are excellent mentors, who are dedicated to helping their students achieve specific learning outcomes through their work together. To be recognized within the program's fantastic pool of mentors is incredibly noteworthy."

Student nominator Anna Ngo emphasized Kontoyianni's zeal for pharmaceutical research and understanding that making mistakes is part of learning and growing.

"She encourages me to explore my curiosity and know the purpose behind everything I do in the lab, instead of ignorantly completing my tasks," Ngo wrote in her recommendation letter. "Thinking creatively is pertinent in many aspects of life. Having me practice creative problem solving speaks volumes about how Dr. Kontoyianni wants to prepare her students for research and life beyond it."

Dimick was recognized by student Haley Mason for his compassion and flexibility, as he mentored and encouraged her to persevere despite personal challenges she was experiencing.

"Instead of relieving me of my position and taking up the next candidate, he went out of his way to work with me and help me overcome the challenges I was facing, at my own pace," Mason said. "I am grateful to him for not letting me give up this opportunity."

URCA students Margaret Scarsdale, of Troy, and Rachel Wagner, of St. Peters, Mo., were also commended for their exceptional work in the program. Scarsdale, a senior political science major, earned the Research Assistant of the Semester Award. Wagner, a sophomore majoring in musical theater, was presented the Creative Activities Assistant of the Semester Award.

Scarsdale was nominated by associate professor in the Department of Political Science, Laurie Rice, PhD, who highlighted the research assistance Scarsdale provided on a project involving presidents' strategic use of a variety of formal tools, including Statements of Administration Policy and signing statements, to influence policy.

“Margaret sees the research potential inherent in the data and has made important suggestions that will influence the coding procedure we undertake next,” said Rice. “She demonstrates a level of excellence in research assistance that rivals that of first and second year graduate research assistants, even at the nation's top 10 PhD programs in political science.”

Scarsdale presented her research at the Midwest Political Science Association's annual meeting in Chicago, a conference which draws an international audience. She is in the process of applying for graduate school.

Wagner's faculty mentor Marc Shapman, PhD, celebrated her incredible contributions to the University's fall opera/musical *The Mikado*.

“She has served as an assistant stage director, stage manager, publicist and assistant choreographer,” Shapman explained. “She is punctual, organized, creative, and a genuinely good person. She is an extremely strong dancer, and has been able to serve as dance captain for the production. This enabled us to multi-task in rehearsal, and accomplish twice as much in a regular rehearsal period.”

Wagner will be featured in *The Mikado* as the character Peep Bo. The production runs Friday-Saturday, Dec. 1-2 at 7:30 p.m. in Dunham Hall Theatre on campus. For ticket information, call [618-650-2774](tel:618-650-2774).

For more information on the URCA program at SIUE, visit siue.edu/URCA.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](http://SouthernIllinoisUniversityEdwardsville) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of nearly 14,000.