

# **SIUE URCA program recognizes exceptional faculty mentors and students**

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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's unique Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA) program is celebrating the extraordinary work of faculty mentors and students 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 scholarly activities to gain a hands-on introductory experience.

The Spring 2018 Vaughn Vandegrift URCA Research Mentor of the Semester Award was presented to Susanne DiSalvo, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences.

Thad Duhigg, MFA, professor in the Department of Art and Design, earned the URCA Creative Activities Mentor of the Semester Award.

"All of our approximately 80 URCA Assistant faculty mentors are dedicated to helping their students achieve specific learning outcomes through their work together," said Laura Pawlow, PhD, URCA coordinator and professor in the Department of Psychology. "Dr. DiSalvo and Mr. Duhigg are excellent mentors who are making a positive difference in students' academic journey through research experiences. To be recognized within this fantastic pool as an award winner is incredibly noteworthy."

According to student nominator Sydni Rubio, DiSalvo is a mentor who always goes above and beyond to ensure her students are advancing their knowledge, learning proper techniques in the lab and gaining experience with research publications and presentations. Rubio presented her URCA research at the Illinois State Academy of Science in April.

"With eight students in her lab, Dr. DiSalvo certainly has her hands full, yet she still finds time to provide extensive help, feedback and cheesy jokes to us all," Rubio wrote in her recommendation letter. "She has encouraged me to use my acquired skills and URCA research findings outside of the lab. She has also dedicated an extensive amount of time assisting me with my research proposal, which has helped me immensely as I prepare for graduate school."

Duhigg's student nominator, Joseph Ovalle, described him as a great person, phenomenal instructor and gifted sculptor.

“My URCA Assistantship with Thad has been a game changer,” Ovalle wrote. “He is patient and gives me clear instruction. He has made the URCA experience about learning and developing the skills that I will need for the real world.”

Ovalle aspires to become a professor and positively influence students as his mentor has.

“Thad works hard, comes into the classroom and work space with a great attitude and never gives up on a student,” Ovalle explained. “He’s helped me realize that there is no mistake that can’t be fixed, and that if you work hard enough, you can achieve anything you set your mind to.”

URCA students Clayton Donald, of Burlington, Iowa, and Maika Miller, of Alton, were also recognized for their exceptional work in the program. Donald, a junior chemistry major, earned the Research Assistant of the Semester Award. Miller, a junior music major, was presented the Creative Activities Assistant of the Semester Award.

“Mr. Donald is a bright, young researcher who shows a deep and growing interest in science,” said faculty nominator Kevin Tucker, PhD, assistant professor of chemistry. “Given he is a junior, his desire to excel in research, his ability to grasp conceptually everything that we are doing in the lab, and the way he explains the material to new students have been impressive. He is willing to apply himself and works towards the lab research goals endlessly.”

Tucker added that Clayton holds the values that are of utmost importance in research. “He is intellectually bright, dependable, respectful and honest,” he said.

Miller was an invaluable asset for SIUE’s March production of *The Rake’s Progress*, according to faculty mentor Marc Schapman, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Music. Her various roles included assistant stage director, stage manager, costume designer, publicist and props manager.

“Maika is enthusiastic, energetic, and her positive attitude and work ethic are infectious,” Schapman said. “Her largest contributions were in publicity and prop management. She has a keen sense for design and her attention to detail in the area of publicity was extremely helpful.”

Miller was also featured in the opera’s ensemble.

“Because of this opera’s level of difficulty, undergraduate singers rarely perform in it, making this a truly notable accomplishment,” Schapman added.

For more information about SIUE's URCA program, visit [siue.edu/urca](https://siue.edu/urca).

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](https://siue.edu) 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.