

# **SIUE's URCA program recognizes outstanding faculty mentors and student researchers**

by Megan Wieser

November 16 2018 11:30 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA) program is recognizing the excellent 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 Fall 2018 Vaughn Vandegrift URCA Research Mentor of the Semester Award was presented to Ron Worthington, PharmD, professor of pharmaceutical sciences in the School of Pharmacy.

Carolina Rocha, PhD, professor in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, earned the URCA Creative Activities Mentor of the Semester Award.

"All of our approximately 90 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. Worthington and Dr. Rocha are outstanding mentors who are making a positive difference in students' academic journeys through research experiences. To be recognized within this fantastic pool as an award winner is incredibly noteworthy."

"Dr. Worthington is an incredible professor who works with enthusiasm and excitement," said former URCA Assistant Brentsen Wolf. "He teaches with the goal of inspiring students to research further, and to drive interest in this field and in the sciences in general. In class and through the URCA program, you see this mentality shine brightly."

URCA student nominator Gregory Takacs noted Worthington always takes student input seriously and steps up at all teachable moments. Takacs emphasized Worthington's "dedication, diligence, patience and leadership" are always at play in his interactions with students, making them feel valued.

Student nominator Rachel Liefer wrote in support of Rocha's ability to challenge her URCA students and give them creative reign in the exploration of ideas.

"As Dr. Rocha's URCA assistant, I have gained cultural insights that are commonly overlooked in real world application," Liefer explained. "The research goal she presents challenges me in a way that will properly prepare me for a teaching career. The amazing experience she provides has inspired me to step outside of my comfort zone and look at the bigger picture not only academically, but also personally."

URCA students Dalia Hassan, of Springfield, and Jeri Reuter, of Granite City, were also celebrated for their exceptional work. Hassan, a junior chemistry major, earned the Research Assistant of the Semester Award. Reuter, a senior English major, was presented the Creative Activities Assistant of the Semester Award.

Faculty mentor Kevin Tucker, PhD, assistant professor of chemistry, describes Hassan as organized, meticulous and reliable. He says he knew she would be a standout student from their first conversation.

"She is a self-starter who only needs the initial push – every mentor's dream," Tucker noted. "She willingly goes above and beyond her project by helping other students on

their projects. She has been trained on all the techniques in the lab related to her project and divergent from it, because she wants to be able to do anything and everything.”

In spring 2018, Hassan’s research presentation earned first place at the Illinois Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation Annual Conference.

Reuter’s ambition and attention to detail supported her receipt of an URCA award.

Her faculty mentor, Jessica DeSpain, PhD, associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, wrote in strong support of Reuter for her impressive work on [The Wide, Wide World Digital Edition](#) project. According to DeSpain, the project tracks the textual and visual variants of over 174 copies of the 19th-century transatlantic bestseller.

“Jeri understands the importance of getting this work right, applies herself to the work fervently and energetically, and pushes all of us to understand the value of it in intellectually meaningful ways,” DeSpain wrote. “In this one semester, Jeri pushed herself to become an expert in bibliographical description, metadata best practices and scanning methods. I cannot imagine a student more deserving of this award.”

For more information on SIUE’s URCA program, visit [siue.edu/URCA](http://siue.edu/URCA).

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) 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 more than 13,000.