

SIUE URCA Program Develops Nursing Student's Lifelong Passion, Leads to National Recognition

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville senior nursing major Paige Niepoetter aspires to become a life-changing cancer researcher. Given her drive and the applied experiences that have developed her passion for research, Niepoetter is positioned to achieve her dream of becoming a surgical oncologist specializing in breast cancer.

As a nursing student at SIUE, the Centralia native has capitalized upon the unique opportunity to work alongside faculty mentor Chaya Gopalan, PhD, to conduct research through the University's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA) program. Her scholarly work that considers intermittent fasting/eating patterns in obese and non-obese rats recently received national recognition.

Niepoetter received a prestigious \$1,500 award through the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) DREAM Program to attend the Experimental Biology 2019 Meeting held in early April in Orlando. Additionally, Niepoetter was one of 50 student researchers selected from a pool of more than 5,000 abstracts, to present at the convention's Welcome Reception.

"Winning the FASEB DREAM travel award was a blessing," Niepoetter said. "Research is a passion of mine, but without proper funding, I wasn't sure if I'd be able to attend the entire conference. This award made it possible for me to attend various sessions of interest, connect with fellow researchers and gather ideas for new research directions."

"Paige is a wonderfully focused student who works hard and is incredibly responsible," said Gopalan, who holds dual appointments as an associate professor in the School of Nursing's Department of Primary Care and Health Systems, and the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior's Department of Applied Health.

"She has been in my lab for three years, is on two major research projects, and has been able to secure four abstracts and one manuscript for publication," Gopalan added. "This is only the beginning, as we will be writing several papers by the end of the summer. Paige will surely do amazing things in her future!"

Niepoetter credits Gopalan's incredible mentorship through the URCA program with developing her passion for research and helping clarify her decision to apply to medical school.

"The URCA program allows you to explore in great detail your interest in subjects that you only briefly touch on in the classroom setting," Niepoetter explained. "It has also developed my leadership skills and helped me gain a sense of confidence."

"Dr. Gopalan has been incredibly encouraging along the way, and her support has led me farther in these studies than I ever thought I was capable," she added.

For more information on SIUE's URCA program, visit siue.edu/URCA/.

The SIUE School of Nursing's programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality

research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling nearly 1,400 students in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.