

SIUE's URCA Program Recognizes Exceptional Faculty Mentors and Student Researchers

by Kalli Collins

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EDWARDSVILLE - Each semester, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities (URCA) program recognizes outstanding faculty mentors and student researchers.

The URCA program encourages, supports and enables undergraduate students of all disciplines to participate in research and creative activities under faculty mentorship. These experiences allow undergraduate students opportunities to engage in scholarship, interact with faculty, and fully connect in the educational process of discovering and creating.

The fall 2022 Vaughn Vandegrift URCA Research Mentor of the Semester Award was presented to Carolyn Butts-Wilmsmeyer, PhD, associate professor in the College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Biological Sciences and director of the SIUE Center for Predictive Analytics (C-PAN).

“All URCA faculty mentors have to ‘try out’ each semester, and it is not uncommon to receive over 120 faculty applications for approximately 90 funded positions,” said Ariel Belasen, PhD, URCA coordinator and professor in the Department of Economics and Finance. “Whittling it down to the best 90 applicants is extremely tough. Those who make it are excellent mentors who are extremely dedicated to helping students achieve specific learning outcomes. To be recognized within this fantastic pool as an award winner is incredibly noteworthy.”

Students Mary-Margaret Benware and Hannah Labby nominated Butts-Wilmsmeyer, acknowledging her continuous efforts to go above and beyond in the field of crop sciences.

“Dr. Butts-Wilmsmeyer has an abundant wealth of knowledge to contribute to her students,” they said. “She strengthens us as a team and is always there to help us with presented challenges.”

Research Assistant of the Semester Awards were presented to Rie’Onna Holmon, a junior in the Department of English, and Ryan Kulasekara, a junior electrical engineering major. Holmon was nominated by Elizabeth Cali, PhD, associate professor of English. Kulasekara was nominated by Jon D. Klingensmith, PhD, associate professor and chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

“Rie’Onna’s work this semester has been nothing short of an extraordinary contribution to our stated research goals,” said Cali. “In fact, she has consistently exceeded expectations I typically reserve for graduate level research assistants. Her research approach is innovative, driven by an amalgam of intellectual curiosity and sound research methods.”

“Ryan has now worked on several different projects in my lab, all providing meaningful impact to the overall direction and goal of the lab,” said Klingensmith. “In doing so, he has adapted to each new project quickly, continued to proactively seek out guidance and new work, and become a meaningful contributor.”

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

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](https://siue.edu) provides students with a high-quality education that powerfully transforms the lives of all individuals who seek something

greater. A premier metropolitan university, SIUE is creating social and economic mobility for individuals while also powering the workforce of the future. 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 12,500.