

## Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity (URCA) Mini-Grants Program: AYRA and RPG Awards

The Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities program was initiated in fall of 2002 as part of the College of Charleston 4<sup>th</sup> Century Initiative. Undergraduate students are invited to apply for support from the URCA program either to conduct projects or to assist in the expenses related to presenting the results of projects at meetings, conferences or competitions.

**Funding Guidelines:** The funds for the AYRA and RPG awards are limited and will be awarded by the Director on a competitive basis, based upon the recommendation of faculty evaluators and available funding. Funds are not held in reserve, to issue awards to worthy proposals later in the academic year. For this reason, applicants are encouraged to apply as soon as possible for funding from the Mini-Grant program. A minimum of two anonymous faculty members will evaluate each application. The applications must be prepared for the faculty reviewers who will not be experts in the subject area of the applicant.

When completing the Itemized Budget, be advised that the reviewers will use the directions given to the applicant to guide the review:

**Itemized Budget:** Items over \$50 must be listed separately. Items under \$50 may be listed collectively. The relevance of each request to the project must be justified. The funding limit for projects not involving travel is \$300. Travel requests should state the cost and mode of transportation. Note that the Mini-grant fund provides a maximum of \$400 for international or national conferences, \$200 for regional conferences, and \$50 for state conferences. Multiple applicants will be expected to carpool when possible. Durable items purchased with Mini-grant funds are considered to be the property of the College of Charleston, and must remain in the custody and possession of the College at the conclusion of the project. Also describe any additional support for the project, being sure to specify items to be funded with the support of this grant.

Even though the URCA program will only be able to provide limited support for projects in the Mini-Grant programs, the projected full costs of the project should be listed on the budget page. The URCA program tracks the amount of money requested, the amount of money allowed by program guidelines, and the amount of money awarded to applicants as part of its annual program review, and then uses that data to justify program funding. For RPG applications, shared expenses (carpooling, housing) are strongly encouraged where practical.

When completing the Project Description & Justification Section, be advised that the reviewers will use the directions given to the applicant to guide the review:

### **Project Description & Justification**

In the space provided below, the student applicant(s) must describe the nature of the research project or creative work. The description must be general enough that a faculty member from a discipline outside that of the project can appreciate the significance of the work. Applicants are encouraged to attach (as an appendix to this application) a technical abstract that was, or is being, submitted to the meeting/conference. However, the technical meeting abstract for the presentation will probably not suffice as the Project Description & Justification requested below as part of this URCA Mini-grant application. The quality of this statement will be a primary criterion in the evaluation of the application. Students are strongly advised to have this statement carefully reviewed by the faculty mentor. Maximum 250 words.

As a general guide, the project description should be able to stand up to the “*parent*” test. If your mother, father, uncle or aunt were to read your description, would they understand the nature, purpose and significance of the proposed work? This is not an easy task to fulfill. You must avoid the use of technical jargon or idiomatic phrases, and at the same time you must avoid oversimplification. It is often easy to overlook the relevance of a project to someone viewing it from the outside, but that is what you must try to do when preparing this abstract. Why should we (those outside of your discipline) care about the costume to be designed, entity to be studied, literature to be reviewed, mathematical problem to be solved, or whatever issue it is you are going to investigate or will be reporting. Whatever that reason is, you should start your project description off with a clear statement of that general relevance, and then get to specific relevance within your field. It is highly recommended that you “sound out” your description to yourself and your mentor several times, by reading it out aloud, before settling in on the final version of your text.

When completing the Roles Statement, once again, pay attention to the directions on the form.

**Roles Statement** In the space provided below, the student applicant(s) and/or mentor(s) must clearly describe the roles of all participants. If this is travel request, the roles of the student and mentor BOTH while working on the project being presented AND while at the meeting must be clearly stated. It is expected that the student will be formally recognized (name in program, on title, *etc.*) for her or his contributions to the work product being presented or exhibited. The Mini-grant program will fund proposals in which mentors offer very little creative input, provided that they do provide appropriate guidance and oversight. The program will also support projects in which mentors fully direct the project, as long as they seek to develop student research skills or creativity in demonstrable ways and the student is publicly acknowledged for contribution to the work product. In either case, the description must be general enough that a faculty member from any academic discipline will be able to understand the role of the student(s), the role of the mentor(s), and the nature of the interaction between them. It must not be assumed that the reviewers will have a common standard or concept for the best practices of mentoring undergraduate research. Maximum 250 words.

Unlike the Project Description which must be written by the student, the roles statement may be prepared by either the mentor or the student. One approach might be to have the student applicant write a brief section describing her or his participation on the project, then have the mentor add a few supporting comments as a second section. But whatever style is taken in preparing this section, make sure that a faculty member unfamiliar with you or your discipline will appreciate the role of each partner and the nature of the interaction between the student and the mentor after reading this section.

### **AYRA Award Description**

With a successful Academic Year Research Award (AYRA) mini-grant application, students can get financial support to conduct faculty mentored research or creative activity during the academic year. The funds provided in the AYRA program are substantially less than those that are available in the MAYS program. However, the AYRA funding is appropriate for many projects, and can often be used as seed money for a larger project that might eventually lead to a MAYS or SURF award. The AYRA application process is fairly

straightforward, but the applications are critically reviewed by faculty so it is worth looking over the guidelines carefully, planning in advance, and working closely with your mentor if you want to submit a competitive application to this program. The research idea which forms the basis of the application can be the student's, a faculty member's, or it can be derivative of a faculty member's professional interests. In either case, the applicants should make it clear to the reviewers what type of project is proposed, and the primary investigator (person who has primary intellectual custody of the project and its results) should be clearly identified. Up to \$300 per student in an academic year will be available on a competitive basis.

The AYRA program is intended to support the independent, faculty-supervised student projects or student-faculty collaborative projects of full time, undergraduate, degree-seeking students at the College of Charleston. The awards may be used only for expenses (*student salary is not an allowed expense*) needed to conduct the research. Separate research presentation grants (RPG) are available to support student travel related to presentations of undergraduate research or creative works. Travel needed to conduct research is supported by the AYRA program. Summer undergraduate research awards are also available (see SURF) to provide major support for the summer research efforts of faculty-student teams. While student salaries are not allowed in the AYRA program, student salaries are expected in the SURF program and they are provided for academic year projects through the larger MAYS awards.

### **RPG Award Description**

With a successful Research Presentation Grants (RPG) application, a student can get financial support to present the results of her or his research or creative efforts. Once again, the application process is fairly straightforward, but the applications are critically reviewed by faculty so planning in advance and working closely with your mentor are the key elements needed to submit a competitive application to this program. Up to \$400 per student will be available on a competitive basis, depending upon the nature of the event at which the presentation will be made.

The RPG program is intended to support the travel costs associated with the research and creative presentation/competition efforts of College of Charleston undergraduates. It is often the case a student will not be in a position to present the results of her or his undergraduate work until after graduating, and so for the RPG awards, a recent graduate of the College of Charleston (within 6 months), is considered to be eligible for support from this program. The RPG awards may only be used for travel necessary to present the results of student research and creative activity at meetings, conferences, competitions, *etc.* Separate awards (AYRA or MAYS) are available to support independent faculty supervised or student projects or student-faculty collaborative projects conducted in the academic year. Summer undergraduate research or creative activity projects with faculty awards (SURF) are also available to provide major support for full-time summer research efforts of faculty-student teams.

**When to submit a Mini-Grant application:**

Applications may be submitted for AYRA or RPG awards on three review cycles during the Academic Year. The first application deadline is the *first Friday in September*, the second deadline is the *first Friday in November*, the *third deadline is January 18*, and the last deadline is the *first Friday after Spring Break*. Electronic submissions of completed applications should be received before 5 PM on the deadline date in order to be considered for funding. *If there are special circumstances, applications can be submitted for special review outside of these regular review cycles, upon approval of the Director.*

**What to submit as part of a Mini-Grant application:**

Each application must include a completed ***Mini-grant application form, which includes the URCA Uniform Application Cover Page.***

**How to submit a Mini-Grant application:**

- Step ONE: Electronic copy (PDF or MS Word) of the entire application should be submitted by email to the Director of the URCA Program ([mayc@cofc.edu](mailto:mayc@cofc.edu))
- Step TWO: Original signed cover page of the application should be submitted in hand or by campus mail to the Director of the URCA Program: **Cynthia May, Department of Psychology.**

***CAUTIONARY STATEMENT CONCERN RPG EXPENSES:*** *Students should not commit to travel until the written authorization for the travel expenses is provided. It is the responsibility of the traveler and the authorizing official to ensure that the most economical means of travel is utilized and justified. All applicable College of Charleston rules and regulations for travel will apply, and approved applicants will be required to have an approved College of Charleston Travel Authorization form submitted to the Controller's Office not less than four days prior to the commencement of travel, and then to complete the necessary paperwork no more than 10 days after the travel to qualify for reimbursement. Clearly indicate on the paperwork that the traveler is a student. It is the responsibility of the student to keep and then submit all receipts and records in order to receive travel reimbursements. Any reimbursement submitted to the Controller's Office that does not have an approved Travel Authorization on file will be delayed until proper approval is obtained and will be reported to the appropriate administrative head. Failure to follow the rules and regulations for travel will result in student losing the support approved by the RPG program, even if the travel expenses have been approved. In most cases, the travel will require more support than can be provided by the RPG program. Seeking supplemental funding from other internal sources (departments, schools, honor program, etc.) or external sources (grants) is strongly encouraged from other internal sources (departments, schools, honor program, etc.) or external sources (grants) is strongly encouraged.*