

Best Practices of the *University of Central Florida Undergraduate Research Journal*

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About the *UCF URJ*

The *University of Central Florida Undergraduate Research Journal's* mission is to showcase exemplary articles from a wide range of student scholarship in all fields. The journal also strives to share undergraduate student scholarship in a timely and comprehensive manner as an electronic publication. We seek outstanding research submitted by undergraduate students who have been involved in faculty-mentored research projects and activities related to scholarship. Before publication, each submission is subject to two rigorous, double-blind reviews by faculty members who are experts in their field. These reviews provide students valuable feedback and help create an experience that accurately represents the scholarly and professional publishing process.

The *UCF URJ* was established in 2005. From 2005 to 2008, Graduate Assistants managed the journal, and in 2009 a Faculty Editor joined the Office of Undergraduate Research in its efforts to strengthen the journal's presence on campus.

Students who publish in the *UCF URJ* enjoy a positive publishing experience, and faculty support its pedagogical and professional objectives. The *UCF URJ* succeeds when our students succeed, so it is imperative that we communicate to as many students as possible both our mission and the ways in which publishing their research benefits them and their careers. Since so many student organizations and opportunities compete for our students' attention, getting one's voice heard at a school of UCF's size requires persistence. We ensure the *URJ's* success by publicizing the journal widely and then working with students individually throughout the writing process.

Publicizing the *UCF URJ*

UCF's large undergraduate population—43,000 undergraduate students in 2009-10—presents unique challenges for publicizing the *UCF URJ*. Advertising opportunities that reach the entire campus (e.g., student newspaper advertisements, large banners) are costly. Thus, the *UCF URJ's* publicity and recruitment efforts focus primarily on students who have expressed interest in undertaking research and on students who are actively engaged in such research. For students newly interested in pursuing research opportunities, the journal provides an incentive to embark upon an in-depth research project, and it also exemplifies how undergraduates can expand their resumes through research pursuits. We also concentrate our recruiting efforts on students likely to be interested in further developing their academic research profiles because they are already participating in advanced undergraduate research. These cohorts include students writing Honors in the Major theses, students enrolled in independent research credit hours, and students participating in other structured campus programs (e.g., McNair Scholars). Publicity items fall under one of three general categories: print flyers and posters, electronic correspondence, and public presentations.

Print Flyers and Posters

Our print materials include simple and eye-catching flyers, bookmarks, and posters developed by student graphic designers. These materials are distributed at workshops addressing undergraduate research and at various tabling events throughout campus, such as orientations, welcome expos, and learning fairs. The *UCF URJ* also delivers personal invitations to participants at UCF's annual Showcase of Undergraduate Research Excellence, inviting them to submit a manuscript of their research for publication.

Electronic Correspondence

Due to its efficiency and minimal costs, the majority of the *UCF URJ's* advertising occurs electronically. Email publicity notifications are sent to the Office of Undergraduate Research's student listserv and to students enrolled in independent research courses and other research programs (e.g., showcases, travel grant programs, Honors in the Major). Faculty members identified as actively involved with undergraduate research are also emailed about the opportunity to work with their students on manuscript submissions. The Office of Undergraduate Research developed a Facebook page in 2008 and began twittering in 2009; these outlets allow us to promote a variety of undergraduate research opportunities and to communicate with students through online media forms that many of them use in their daily lives.

Public Presentations

The *UCF URJ* also promotes the opportunity to publish through short presentations during the orientation sessions for Honors in the Major students and during a summer Introduction to Research course. In these sessions, the Faculty Editor speaks briefly about the *UCF URJ* and shows the journal's website to students to illustrate the benefits of scholarly publishing. By uniting our recruiting efforts across these venues, we hope to provide students numerous opportunities to learn about the benefits of publication and the ways in which they can disseminate their scholarship to as wide an audience as possible.

Submission Process

A student works with a faculty mentor to complete a research project and a manuscript detailing his or her work.

The student submits the completed manuscript to the *UCF URJ*, along with the necessary paperwork, including a faculty mentor endorsement form.

Students and their mentors have the option to suggest possible faculty reviewers for their manuscript; if no suggestions are provided, the *URJ* editors contact faculty members in the appropriate field at the University of Central Florida and request a review of the submission. No identifying information about the student is provided to the faculty members to ensure a true "blind" review.

Faculty reviewers read the manuscript and provide comments, suggestions, and an overall recommendation. Reviewers may return one of three publication decisions: accept with minor changes, accept with major changes, or revise and resubmit.

The editors reach a publication decision based on the recommendations of the faculty reviewers and notify the student of the decision.

The manuscript is returned to the student, who makes the necessary revisions before resubmitting it for publication. This process often involves the assistance of the student's faculty mentor and the UCF University Writing Center.

The student resubmits the revised manuscript for a subsequent review.

Manuscripts accepted for publication are reviewed by a copyeditor prior to publication on the *UCF URJ* website both in HTML and PDF formats.



Supporting Student Writing

To encourage students to submit their research to the *UCF URJ*, the Office of Undergraduate Research hosts workshops designed to introduce students to the demands of academic publishing. Our foundational assumption is that, although many students are interested in research, they often do not have a clear understanding either of the basic protocols of publishing or of its potential benefits for their future development as professionals. We currently offer three general workshops throughout the academic year, in addition to specific training workshops to pre-determined populations. The goal of these workshops is to encourage academic publishing in the *UCF URJ* as well as in discipline-specific journals. Regardless of whether attendees publish their undergraduate work, these workshops help students to realize both the importance of communicating their research and the role publishing plays in academic and professional success.

"What Is Academic Publishing?"

This introductory workshop teaches students basic information about the benefits of scholarly research. We stress that scholarly publishing helps to build their credentials as new members of their disciplines. Also in this workshop, we discuss the basic process of publishing, including such concepts as peer review and blind review, as well as an overview of the editorial process.

"How to Publish"

This workshop details the process of researching, revising, and publishing. One of the primary concerns of this presentation is editing: students must learn to hone their work to fit the parameters of publication in a given journal, so we encourage them to pay close attention to the style and publication guidelines of the top journals in their field.

"From Poster to Publication"

In this workshop we explain how students can hone their current research, which they may have already presented at a professional or academic conference, into an academic publication. We emphasize that by preparing a poster students have already taken the first step in writing a manuscript because the poster serves as an outline.

Challenges

Perhaps the greatest challenge of running these workshops, and indeed of editing the *UCF URJ*, is that students often have discipline-specific questions beyond our expertise. In such instances, it is always appropriate to direct students to their mentors (or for the editors to contact experts in the various disciplines of the university). When students need additional support throughout the writing process, the faculty editor of the journal offers one-on-one consultations; also, students are advised to consult the University Writing Center and to enroll in appropriate writing courses so that their prose conveys their ideas in a professional manner.