HISTORY OF UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AT UCO

In 1999 the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) began to establish a role for undergraduate scholarly activities through the program USCARE (Undergraduate Student Center for Advancement of Research and Education). It was centered in the Department of Sponsored Projects and Research under then Dean S. Narasinga Rao and subsequent activities now continue in the Office of Research & Grants. The development of undergraduate research on the UCO campus has benefited from a number of external funding programs.

During the summer of 2000, the National Science Foundation (NSF) grant program call EPSCoR (Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research) provided internships to high school and undergraduate students for research activities on the UCO campus.

Another NSF program called "Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics Scholarships" (CSEMS) was obtained by a consortium of Oklahoma universities, including UCO, Cameron University, East Central University and Southwestern Oklahoma State University.

Other funded programs include the "Ron McNair Scholars" program, the "Louis Stokes Oklahoma Alliance for Minority Participation in Science, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology" as well as recent participation in a Research Undergraduate Institution (RUI) grant funded through the University of Oklahoma.

OCAST (Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology) provides funding to support Oklahoma industries and has featured collaborations between UCO and General Motors, Seagate, Sandy Beaches, the USDA and Unit Parts. These grants provide internships to students that enhance their training in science while enabling companies to benefit by their assistance.

Internships have been established through the "Center for Emerging Technologies," another NSF-funded program.

In 2003, UCO received the NSF-funded SURE-STEP ("Supporting Undergraduate Research and Education for the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Talent Expansion Program") Grant which comprises a consortium of universities: Cameron University, East Central University, Langston University, Southwestern Oklahoma State University and UCO.

Undergraduate students can also receive research assistantships and grants to support their efforts in developing research skills at UCO.

On-campus activities supporting undergraduate research are now common at UCO. For each of the past seven years, UCO has hosted a "Research Day" for regional universities (funded by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education). The number of abstracts submitted for this annual event has steadily risen over the years. The event has hosted over 20 academic institutions during this period of time. Symposia organized by the college of Liberal Arts, Education (Psychology) and Business also occur on the UCO campus and selected students travel to the "Posters on the Hill" program in Washington DC, an event organized by the Council for Undergraduate Research.

The idea of undergraduate research and creative activities was given a university-wide emphasis in 2001 with the development of an "AQIP" (Academic Quality Improvement Project) committee. The goal of this committee was to formulate criteria by which progress in the area of undergraduate scholarly activities could be measured for continuous enhancement. The committee has succeeded in establishing these criteria and is beginning to apply them through assessment methods.