

Living/Learning Center Programs

The University of Vermont

<http://www.uvm.edu/lcenter/>



Scholarly Undergraduate Research Focus (SURF) Suite

Overview

The Scholarly Undergraduate Research Focus (SURF) suite is a quiet, academically-focused environment geared toward educational achievement and academic success. It brings together students who are focused on their academic careers and provides a supportive environment to students who aspire to:

- Enrich their education through guest speakers and group discussion
- Improve reading skills through group selection of books and group discussion
- Improve writing through journaling or reflection papers
- Plan and conduct academically-oriented programs and events of service to the Living / Learning and university community
- Network with UVM faculty from all colleges and majors
- Conduct academic, scholarly research as an undergraduate with a UVM faculty mentor
- Earn a doctorate degree, and
- Remain on a college campus to teach or conduct scholarly research

Applicants **must** be focused on education beyond a bachelor degree. The residents of the suite will include current McNair Scholars*, applicants to the program, and students who plan to conduct research as an undergraduate. Through day-to-day interactions, informal and scheduled meetings and structured discussions, residents of the program suite are able to help guide each other toward their individual goals as learners, future educators and mentors. The McNair Scholars (and when available, McNair alumni who are graduate students at UVM) will share experiences gained inside and outside the classroom to provide others with a realistic understanding and appreciation for teaching, research and mentoring of students who follow. The goal of the program will be to facilitate the creative aspirations of all members and a focus on understanding what it truly means to be an educator.

Learning Objectives

Objective 1: Broaden scholarly interests by scheduling at least 2 guest speakers each academic year from various disciplines.

Action Steps:

1. Collaborate on the selection of and invitation to guest speakers
2. Host a variety of informative speakers from among UVM campus “experts” to talk about their scholarly research, preparing for conferences, improving public speaking skills, making the most of visits to graduate school, and other related topics
3. Invite and arrange travel for national guest speakers whose topics would be of interest to other students in the Living / Learning Center or campus community
4. Establish a tone of “scholarly pursuits” for other undergraduates who aspire to teaching or research on a college campus
5. Make available magazines, articles, and other material about the guest speakers in advance of the visit, to encourage topic research
6. Discuss speakers and their topics in a neutral, supportive environment to help students develop critical thinking and public speaking skills

Objective 2: Increase the awareness of one’s unique reading abilities and writing style; improve upon the skills of comprehension and interpretation

Action Steps:

1. Select at least 1 book a year for suite members to read as a group
2. Schedule times to meet to discuss topic, theme, impact
3. Utilize existing services on campus to attain writing fluency
4. Complete one-page journal-style reflection papers based upon the presentations of guest speaker or group reading assignments
5. Learn to critique the work of other residents in the suite in a supportive, yet analytical manner, an important component in becoming a fluent speaker and writer
6. Suite residents in their junior year will complete a statement of interest for graduate school application

Objective 3: Develop a deeper understanding of the culture of academia, in anticipation of becoming a teacher or researcher on a college campus

Action Steps:

1. Nominate UVM faculty or experts from other institutions / organizations as guest speakers and provide reasons for the nomination
2. If nominated speaker is selected, research and disseminate examples of past writing / speaking to other members of the suite and L/L complex for advance preparation
3. Arrange travel and meals
4. Reserve space, invite other groups, advertise event
5. Write press release for University Communications and if available, provide photographs
6. Serve as guest speaker’s host
7. Facilitate follow-up discussions with other members of the suite and L/L complex
8. Participate in the planning, coordination and hosting of the annual Scholarly Undergraduate Research Fair (SURF UVM)
9. For juniors and seniors conducting research, submit proposal and abstract for poster presentation during SURF UVM – Student Research Conference
10. Interface with faculty volunteers as mentors and / or adjudicators
11. Work with staff, administrators and others on the logistics of a campus-wide event

Community Service

As future leaders on college campuses, all SURF residents will be required to participate for no less than 10 hours a semester in either an individual community service project on campus or as a member of the suite group activity. Examples of an **individual activity** might include:

- Alternative Spring Break
- *American Reads* or *America Counts* in local elementary schools
- Drug & Alcohol-Free Options (OPT)
- Leadership Role in Academic-related Student Group (Club, Honor Society)
- Student Government Association (SGA)
- Tutoring through the Learning Cooperative
- UVM Child Care Center
- Volunteers in Action (VIA)

The SURF **group activity** is a service project to the entire university community with tangential benefit to the local community. In the spring of 2007 at the request of and with the full endorsement of the UVM Provost, the McNair Scholars planned, conducted and hosted the first-ever, campus-wide Scholarly Undergraduate Research Fair (SURF UVM) for all majors from all colleges. It was an interdisciplinary event involving students, faculty and staff. For the planning team, it provided an opportunity to experience academia on a personal and professional level. Not only did they submit their research abstracts for consideration as presenters, but also they had the opportunity to engage with the central administration, deans, department chairs, faculty members and staff on a collaborative project of benefit to all.



Prior to this event, many programs and departments across campus hosted their own event to recognize the outstanding achievement of their students (APLE, EPSCoR, HELiX, McNair, URECA, and College Honors Programs, among others). What was unique about the first UVM SURF was the opportunity for students from multiple disciplines performing very different types of research to highlight and showcase their scholarly work to a broad audience.

In 2007, SURF UVM was a pilot event for 35 students and their faculty mentors held in the Billings Student Center. In April of 2008, the conference expanded to 141 student participants (82 undergraduates, 3 MD/PhD candidates from the College of Medicine, and 56 graduate students) and was held in the Davis Center. The 2007 pilot event was limited to poster presentations but in 2008 and forward, the format provides both oral and poster presentations.

* Applicants to the SURF suite must be full time UVM undergraduates. Applicants to the McNair Scholars Program (funded by the US Department of Education) must be undergraduates who are

first generation college students with limited financial resources OR students from ethnicities underrepresented in doctoral programs (African-American / Black, Hispanic / Latino, Native American / Alaskan, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or Blended Ethnicity from list above). Selection and participation in the SURF suite does not guarantee selection to the McNair Scholars Program but does offer the opportunity to learn about the program from participants.