

The Library Prize for Undergraduate Research University of California, Berkeley

Overview

The Library Prize for Undergraduate Research recognizes excellence in undergraduate research projects that incorporate the use of University Library collections and demonstrate sophisticated information literacy skills on the part of the undergraduate researcher. The award review committee considers the product of the research, but focuses on the research *process*: the demonstration of library research skills, adept use of library resources, and reflection upon the strategies utilized to investigate a research problem.

Since 2002, the Library Prize as provided a public means to recognize undergraduate research projects and reinforce the Library's role in contributing to students' learning. A committee comprised of librarians, faculty, and academic support staff use criteria based on the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* for the project review and selection process.

The annual budget is \$10,000, which funds the awards, exhibits, reception, and brochures and posters for publicity. Up to six cash prizes are awarded annually to students at a reception hosted by the Library, and Library exhibits highlight projects from recent award winners. All award-winning projects are added to the collection of the University Archives.

The Library Prize was the first of its kind in the nation. In the past two years at least three other institutions – University of Hawaii, University of Washington, and Temple University – have offered similar prizes for undergraduate research based on this model.

The web site is at: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/researchprize/>

Innovative Aspects

- ◆ Building an inclusive community related to information literacy
- ◆ Integrating the library into the campus' undergraduate research initiative
- ◆ Empowering students to take responsibility for their education
- ◆ Acknowledging developmental stages of information literacy
- ◆ Engaging faculty in valuing and assessing information literacy skills

Building an Inclusive Community Related to Information Literacy

Academic institutions strive to create supportive learning environments that nurture lifelong learning – where inquiry is the norm, problem solving is the focus, and critical thinking is part of the process.

This project involves a wide range of participants who serve in various roles throughout the process: undergraduate students (applicants and winners), graduate students (authors of support letters), faculty (authors of support letters and judges), academic support staff (oversight committee), librarians and public service staff (oversight committee and judges), as well as library and campus administrators (reception speakers). The annual Library Prize reception, held in the most splendid room in the Library, is the occasion when all participants join together to celebrate the prize winners, use of library collections, and research competencies. Campus administrators and the University Librarian present the awards and introduce each winner by reading excerpts from their essay accompanied by comments from the faculty support letters. Faculty and Graduate Student Instructors often attend the reception, as do many of the students' families. No other *undergraduate* event merits this volume of broad campus attention, attendance, and celebration.

Integrating the Library into the Campus' Undergraduate Research Initiative

Recognizing that academic libraries function as a type of laboratory, our organizations are uniquely poised to provide the pivotal link between undergraduates and the research process beyond the classroom.

During the recent accreditation process, UC Berkeley identified "preparing students for successful capstone experiences" as a campus priority for enhancing undergraduate education. At various points throughout the continuum -- exposure, experience, and capstone -- the University Library contributes to student learning. Dr. Christina Maslach, Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, stated, "One of the faculty's most important teaching partners is the University Library. Its staff and resources help students develop the critical thinking and technological abilities necessary to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information." Librarians serve as teaching partners by leading course-related instruction, as well as by providing a wealth of powerful collections and a rich network of library services designed to enable and develop sophisticated research methodologies. The Library Prize project offers a way to promote the role of the University Library in the campus' dual teaching and research mission and to demonstrate the value of the University Library in individual student's lives. For example, the Research Advisory Service (RAS) offers Berkeley undergraduate students writing research papers in the humanities and social sciences thirty-minute appointments with librarians, tailored to the specific needs and skills of the individual, as well as to the specific topic. At the end of each session, information about the Library Prize is proffered and a connection is made between reference, collections, research, and information literacy.

Empowering Students to Take Responsibility for Their Education

Undergraduate students are familiar with being graded on their research papers as final products of their learning. Less often are students encouraged to recognize, explain, and understand the learning processes and specific skills that enable them to successfully conduct research drawing upon library and other information resources.

Along with the research paper written for a course and the instructor's letter of support, the premiere component of the Library Prize application is a 500-750 word research essay in which students describe the research process that enabled them to locate the materials they used. An excellent research paper without the complement of a strong analytical research essay will not be considered for the award. The research essay provides insights into the undergraduate research experience by requiring students to summarize their discovery process – gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information. Many essays include revealing statements about personal setbacks and challenges, false starts, muddled thinking, desperate measures, and despair -- all shared student experiences. Most importantly, they offer a new way to think about, learn from, and enrich the overall undergraduate learning experience. Excerpts of the students' research essays become the centerpieces for a series of exhibits showcased throughout the year, personalizing the undergraduate research experience and informing, instructing and inspiring their peers to be future applicants.

Acknowledging Developmental Stages of Information Literacy

Opportunities for building and evaluating information literacy skills must be available to undergraduate students at multiple stages in their academic careers, and in ways that recognize and respect the cognitive development of the learner.

Information literacy skills are gained, expanded, and honed with repeated exposure and practice. Recognizing that lower-division undergraduates and upper-division undergraduates are likely to be at different stages in their research sophistication and refinement of information literacy skills, Library Prize applications are divided into two pools and up to two awards are designated for lower-division undergraduate students annually. Each year, prior to reading the submissions, the review committee meets to discuss the process for judging and the criteria for each of the two pools of applicants. While the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* articulate an extensive list of skills and abilities, the document does not offer guidance about differentiating depth and expertise for each. The evaluation rubric has been an important tool for this discussion on our campus as we pioneer ways to recognize a progression of these competencies at multiple developmental stages and reward those who have demonstrated excellence as a lower-division student.

Engaging Faculty in Valuing and Assessing Information Literacy Skills

By definition, information literacy initiatives cannot be successfully implemented through the efforts of librarians alone, nor can information literacy skills be truly assessed in isolation of disciplinary content.

This project subtly trains faculty to understand and appreciate the links between information literacy competencies and students' abilities to perform sophisticated research. The review committee is composed of four faculty and three librarians (all of whom remain anonymous). It is the sole responsibility of this committee to read, evaluate, and rank the submitted projects. Because papers are submitted from many disciplines, all committee members are outside of their intellectual comfort zone for at least a portion of the submissions; this scenario creates an environment in which faculty have been receptive to new methods and tools for evaluating student work. Through the committee discussions on the use of the evaluation rubric, faculty and librarians absorb and internalize a new methodology for considering the research process and its effect on overall learning and, ultimately, on the research paper as the final product. In addition, because many students discuss library-related experiences in their essays, faculty learn directly from applicant testimony about the central role played by librarians in teaching students to find and evaluate information, and to think about learning from their research strategies. Each faculty who has served on the review committee comments on the transformative effects it has had on them: exhilaration from reading papers that touch on all subject fields, greater appreciation for information literacy and research skills, heightened awareness of library resources and services, and sharpened expectations for their students in the future.