

# The Library Prize for Undergraduate Research

## Description

The Library Prize for Undergraduate Research is an innovative approach to highlighting Berkeley's dual research and teaching commitment to undergraduate students within and beyond the classroom. Initiated in 2002, the Library Prize recognizes excellence in undergraduate research projects that use University Library collections and demonstrate sophisticated information literacy and research skills. The judges consider the product of the research, but focus on the research *process*: demonstration of library research skills, adept use of library resources, and reflection upon the strategies utilized to investigate a research problem.

This project encompasses three important goals:

- ◆ Empowering students to take responsibility for their education
- ◆ Acknowledging developmental stages of learning
- ◆ Engaging faculty and librarians in valuing information literacy and research skills

### 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 undertake research projects and be future applicants.

### Acknowledging Developmental Stages of Learning

Opportunities for building and evaluating information literacy and research 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.

Research and information literacy skills are gained and expanded 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 placed in 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. An evaluation rubric has been an important tool for this discussion as we pioneer ways to recognize a progression of these competencies.

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### Engaging Faculty and Librarians in Valuing Information Literacy and Research Skills

Research institutions can benefit from engaging both faculty and academic support staff in analyzing students' research skills as they are honed both within and outside of the classroom.

This project encourages faculty and librarians to engage in a collaborative process to understand the links between information literacy competencies and students' abilities to perform sophisticated research. The review committee, composed of four faculty and three librarians, has the sole responsibility of reading, evaluating, and ranking the submitted projects. Because papers come from many disciplines, all committee members are outside of their intellectual comfort zone for at least a portion of the deliberations. Through the committee discussions on the use of the evaluation rubric, faculty and librarians consider a new methodology for considering the research process and its effect on overall learning. Faculty who have served on the review committee comment 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.

This initiative, while led by the Library, is greatly enriched by the spirited contributions of all participants in the process. The annual Library Prize reception is the occasion when all participants – undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, academic support staff, librarians, campus administrators, and family members – join together to celebrate the prize winners as individuals and as exemplars of the broad research enterprise at Berkeley. Campus and Library administrators present the awards and introduce each winner by reading excerpts from the essays 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.

The Library Prize is a campus innovation that maximizes the benefit of the research assignments designed by faculty from departments all across campus. It invites students to reflect on what they have learned through the process of their discoveries, in the hopes that this additional introspection will deepen their learning. Although a strict calculation of the impact on undergraduates is elusive, this initiative has the potential to impact all Berkeley undergraduate students, regardless of major, and supports a number of the campus' objectives outlined in the recent WASC accreditation documents. Since a large percentage of Berkeley's undergraduate students choose to pursue graduate studies, the Library Prize encourages students to develop their awareness of research strategies, their appreciation of library resources, and their experience within a community of scholars. All award-winning projects are added to the collection of the University Archives.

The Library Prize for Undergraduate Research was the first of its kind in the nation and has been a model for similar prizes for undergraduates at three other research institutions.

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## Fact Sheet

The Library Prize recognizes excellence in undergraduate research projects that use University Library collections and demonstrate sophisticated information literacy and research skills. Prizes are awarded annually to students at a reception. All award-winning projects are added to the collection of the University Archives. < <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/researchprize/> >

### Dates / Timeline

- In spring 2002, representatives from the Library, Office of Undergraduate Research, and Division of Undergraduate Education serve on a task force to develop the framework for how the Library Prize will be administered, publicized, evaluated, and awarded.
- In fall 2002, the Library Prize Committee, comprised of six library staff and a representative from another campus academic support unit, are appointed to oversee the publicity, selection process, reception, and exhibits.
- In spring 2003, four faculty are selected to join the panel of judges and select the winners. At the end of spring semester, the Library and the Division of Undergraduate Education jointly present the awards the annual reception in the Morrison Library.
- The appointment of the committee, selection of judges, and reception are repeated annually

### Student Impact

- In the past two academic years, the Library Prize for Undergraduate Research has attracted more than 120 submissions from many departments.
- In 2003, the Library Prize was awarded to four students from Classics, History, and Music; seven additional undergraduates from Economics, History, and Political Science were recognized with honorable mention.
- In 2004, the Library Prize was awarded to six students from Architecture, History, History of Art, Peace and Conflict Studies, Molecular and Cell Biology, and Political Economy of Industrial Societies; five additional undergraduates from History, Landscape Architecture, Latin American Studies, and Spanish were recognized with honorable mention.
- Winning projects are highlighted in exhibits in the Library throughout the year, which allows each winner to communicate with, and influence, a potentially large audience of their peers.

### Faculty Contributions

- Many faculty and Graduate Student Instructors from departments across campus contribute by writing letters of recommendation in support of the student applications.
- Annually four faculty accept invitations to serve on the judging panel. The eight faculty judges to date have hailed from Anthropology, Bioengineering, College Writing, Education, Engineering, English, and History.