Connections
Award

Creating Interactions

2021/2022 GUIDEBOOK
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Overview

The *Connections* Research program was created by the University of South Carolina Aiken Center for Research Excellence to enrich the academic experience of our undergraduates through research opportunities in all disciplines. By providing access to faculty mentoring relationships and a professional research experience, USCA enables students to creatively explore their interests at a more in-depth level than can be attained in the classroom.

Each *Connections* Award will be funded for up to $1000 to fund his or her research project. Competition for this award will be through submission of a research, scholarship, or creative project proposal developed in collaboration with a USC Aiken faculty mentor. Selection is based on the project's educational and intellectual merit, the potential impact of the project, and the student's previous academic success.

Eligibility

Student eligibility:
- any discipline, any academic year
- undergraduates ONLY
- minimum GPA of 3.0
- good standing with the University (no academic or judicial probation)
- must not be a Magellan Scholar

Mentor requirements:
- USC Aiken faculty member
- Non-USC Aiken mentors, such as community partners, may participate as secondary/co-mentors.
- The involvement of multiple mentors is encouraged when additional expertise is valuable or appropriate for the project.

Acceptable projects include:
- mentor-designed projects (students can work directly on a mentor's project and do not have to provide a separate question/topic)
- student generated projects or questions
- service-learning and community-based-research
- any combination of the above

Funds Available

Applicants may request up to $1000 with a project period of up to one year. Awards will have a January start.

Cost Share: This program does not require cost share.

Application process

**Please note:
- Projects can be part of large, on-going research (questions do NOT have to be student generated).
- Service-learning and community-based-research projects are eligible.
- The student must be the primary author of the proposal but it is expected (and required) to work with his/her mentor during the proposal & budget writing process.

☐ Proposal or project description

    ☐ Centered at top of first page, include your project title. Under title: student's full name, major, mentor's name, and department.

    ☐ *Page Limitations*: **May not exceed two (2)** single-spaced pages. References may be on an additional page and are not included in the two page limit.

    ☐ *Format*: Use a readable font (Arial, Helvetica, Times New Roman, etc) and a font size of 11 points or larger with 0.5 inch margins (top, bottom, left, and right) for all pages.

    ☐ A clear, concise description of the proposed project, including the following required sections, section titles required; the following order is suggested but may be altered for narrative flow:

        ☐ Background (OR Relationship to previous research, Knowledge in the field, or Literature Review)

        ☐ Research question (OR Research statement)

        ☐ Project goals and objectives

        ☐ *Project design (OR Methodology)

        ☐ Project timeline

        ☐ Anticipated results/Final products and Dissemination (Dissemination refers to how you will share your work)

        ☐ References cited (OR Works cited, Bibliography, etc) (*Not included in page limit; can be an extra page*)

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*Project Design: This is the most important section of your proposal. Please provide sufficient detail regarding the steps and tasks of your project for the reviewers to evaluate the anticipated project plan and your understanding of it.

☐ Supporting materials (**REQUIRED**):

    ☐ An itemized budget and justification of anticipated expenditures (MUST use budget form provided on the Center for Research Excellence webpage); the budget is in addition to the two page proposal. Please see below for additional budget details.

☐ To complete and submit proposal:

    NOTE: Do NOT scan your proposal

    ☐ Create **ONE** PDF file of proposal and supporting materials. File must be named after the student, as follows: "Last Name_First Initial_Connections 2022". For group projects, name the file: "Last name student 1_ Last name student 2_Connections 2022."

    ☐ Go to https://www.usca.edu/center-for-research-excellence/research-funding/connections.

    ☐ Complete application form and upload proposal file.

ONCE AWARDED:

Connections **Award winners are** *required* **to**

    1) Present their results at USC Aiken's Scholar Showcase

    2) Submit a 1-page research report

    See page 6 for details.

Budget

➢ Maximum budget request: $1000 (you do not have to request the full amount – request the amount appropriate for your project);

➢ *Connections* awards may be used to purchase materials and supplies, student salary, or travel related to the research project.

➢ You must use the budget form on the Center for Research Excellence webpage at www.usca.edu/center-for-research-excellence/research-funding/inbre-probe.

➢ *No cost share or matching funds are required.*

➢ Materials and supplies purchased through this award remain USC Aiken property (*NOT the student's property*).

➢ Students may receive credit while receiving a stipend/salary UNLESS this is not allowed by your department – check with your department for their policy.

➢ **Allowable Costs**
  - Salary and fringe benefits of undergraduate student
  - Student travel essential to conduct the project
  - Project supplies (computer software is permitted but NOT computers or peripherals) – *all purchases remain USC A property*
  - Participant incentives

➢ **Unallowable Costs**
  - Faculty or graduate student compensation
  - Tuition for non-research related programs
  - Salary for anyone other than applicant(s)
  - Alcoholic beverages

Student salary requests must also include fringe benefits, which are various non-wage compensations provided to employees in addition to their normal wages or salaries. This includes things like: FICA (Social Security and Medicare), unemployment, insurance for workplace accidents (worker's comp), etc. This is something that is added to salary of every job that you will ever have but it isn't something you generally are aware of, until you get things like health insurance, vacations, sick leave, and retirement. When you are taking classes, the only cost is worker's comp. This means that fringe rate is calculated differently when you are taking classes and not taking classes. The budget form should calculate this automatically.

FOR MENTORS

1) Please call Michele Harmon (X3607) or William Jackson (X3601) if you have any questions.
2) *Connections* proposals are NOT submitted or managed through USCeRA
3) Awards will be made available to the student through existing departmental/school accounts.

There are 7 steps described below to successful submission of the *Connections* proposal:

1) Although your input is expected, please refrain from writing the proposal for the student. It is unfair to those faculty mentors who do require their student to write his/her own proposal.

2) Proposal submission will be by email to the Center for Research Excellence (cre@usca.edu). The completed proposal should be attached as a single PDF document.
   ➢ The document should contain:
      i. Student's project description
      ii. Budget form
   ➢ This document should be named: Student last name_first initial_Connections 2021: Doe_J; for groups: Doe_Smith_Jones_Connections 2021
   ➢ Please do not scan.

3) Once received, both you and the student will receive a confirming email.

Group Projects

A small team of 2-4 students may be considered. For group submissions:

• Describe the group project in ONE "Proposal or project description"

• FILE name should be Student 1 last name_Student 2 last name_etc

• Additional pages are permitted for proposal; 1 page per additional student (2 students=3 pages; 3 students=4 pages; etc.)

• Under the section "Methodology or project design," clearly state duties and role of each student (if doing same, state such); provide justification for size of group

• For budgetary reasons, the maximum award for group projects will be $1000

Projects involving vertebrate animals, human subjects, or biohazards

For research projects involving vertebrate animals:

- *Connections* proposals may be submitted prior to approval by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC).
- Include a statement within your project description/timeline that you are submitting for IACUC approval and will comply with all rules, regulations, and training requirements.
- NOTE: Projects involving animals must maintain compliance with regulations at all times or funding will be revoked.
- For more information, mentors may contact the Chair of the USC Aiken IACUC: Dr. April DeLaurier (aprild@usca.edu).

For research projects involving human participants: USC Aiken is required by the federal government to follow strict guidelines when human subjects are involved in research projects requiring Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Human subject's research INCLUDES studies that use:

- data collected through interventions, interactions, or observations with human participants (e.g., surveys, interviews, testing, or observational procedures); and/or
- existing data sets containing any personal information (e.g., medical records, educational records, voting records).

- Include a statement within your project description/timeline that you are submitting for Human Subjects approval and will comply with all rules, regulations, and training requirements.
- For more information and applications: http://orc.research.sc.edu/humansubject.shtml
- For Human Subject FAQs: http://orc.research.sc.edu/hs_faq.shtml
- For ALL Human subjects questions: contact the USC Office of Research Compliance (http://orc.research.sc.edu/contact.shtml; 803-777-7095)
- Projects involving human subjects must maintain compliance with regulations at all times.

For research projects involving biohazardous material: USC Aiken is required to follow strict state and federal guidelines related to the use of biohazardous materials. Student proposing the use of biohazardous materials must receive training prior to initiating the project. Contact William Jackson (billj@usca.edu) to arrange a training session.

For each of these situations, the student/mentor must have the appropriate approvals before funding will be made available.

Application Review Process

Applications from eligible students that are complete and responsive to these guidelines will be evaluated for merit by the Review committee. The Review committee will provide a prioritized list of recommendations for funding to the Center for Research Excellence, based on the quality of the proposals per the review criteria. Awards will be made based on review committee recommendations and available funds.

The following criteria will be used to assess proposals (a copy of the review rubric can be found on the *Connections* webpage):

➢ Overall merit
➢ Student's clarity of explanation
   o Research topic or question
   o Project plan or how the question is to be answered
   o Significance or impact of project
   o Writing style
   o Timeline
➢ Student's readiness for project and/or the plan for gaining needed skills
➢ Student's anticipated plan for sharing the project results (examples: presentation, publication, exhibit, performance, etc)

Applicants and mentors will be notified via e-mail of award decisions. See webpage for announcement date.

Award Administration

Connections awardees are **required** to:

1) Present their research at USC Aiken's Research Day **and**
2) Submit a 1-page research report to the Center for Research Excellence (guidelines: http://web.usca.edu/center-for-research-excellence/cre-program.dot). The research report is due 1 month after completion of the project or prior to graduation.

Connections awardees are **encouraged** to:

1. publish in professional, peer-reviewed journals
2. present, perform, or showcase work at professional, discipline specific conferences, meetings, and presentations

➢ Expenditures –Established University procedures must be followed in expending project funds. Special attention should be paid to policies and procedures relating to Purchasing, Travel, and Personnel. Compensation (of any form) for faculty and graduate students is not allowed. **All grant overages are the mentor's responsibility.**

➢ Compliance Issues - If the project includes the use of humans as research subjects (including surveys) or vertebrate animals, the faculty member is responsible for ensuring IRB or IACUC approval (see page 5). The faculty member is also responsible for compliance with USC Aiken, state and federal requirements relating to the use of biohazardous materials. Student proposing the use of biohazardous materials must receive training prior to initiating the project. Contact William Jackson (billj@usca.edu) to arrange a training session.

➢ Publications and Presentations - Any publications or presentations produced as a result of this award must contain an acknowledgment of USC's support such as: "This work is partially supported by a grant from the USC Aiken Center for Research Excellence *Connections* program."