Primer Award

PROBe program, stage I

2026-2027 GUIDEBOOK
Table of Contents

Overview	1
Eligibility	1
Funds Available	1
Application process	2
For Mentors	3
Projects involving vertebrate animals, human subjects, or biohazards	3
Application Review Process	4
Award Administration	5

Overview

The *Primer* Research program was created by the University of South Carolina Aiken Passport to Research Opportunities in Biomedicine (PROBe) Program to enrich the academic experience of our undergraduates in biomedical disciplines. USC Aiken's PROBe Program is funded by a grant from the South Carolina IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) made possible by a grant from the National Institutes of Health. *Primer* awards represent stage I of the USC Aine PROBe program. By providing access to faculty mentoring relationships and a professional research experience, PROBe enables students to creatively explore their interests in biomedical research at a more in-depth level than can be attained in the classroom. All students performing biomedical-related research are eligible to apply for funding through the PROBe *Primer* award program, but it is designed to help students in their first year of research.

Each *Primer* Award will be funded for up to $3000 to fund a faculty-mentored research. Competition for this award will be through submission of a research project proposal developed in collaboration with a USCA 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.

The PROBe program is administered through the USC Aiken Center for Research Excellence (https://www.usca.edu/research/undergraduate-research/).

There will be a call for proposals each fall semester, with applications **DUE 4 December 2026**. Awards will be announced in early January and have a start date of January 5. Funds can be spent through August 31.

Eligibility

Student eligibility:

- Area of interest: Biochemistry, Developmental Biology, Genetics, Immunology, Neuroscience, or other biomedical area with prior approval by PROBe committee
- any academic year (primarily freshman and sophomores)
- undergraduates ONLY
- minimum GPA of 3.0
- good standing with the University (no academic or judicial probation)
- cannot concurrently hold a Magellan or *Extension* award

Mentor requirements:

- USC Aiken faculty member
- 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
- any combination of the above

Funds Available

Applicants may request up to $3000 with a project period of up to 8 months (5 Jan 2027 – 31 Aug 2027).

- *Primer* awards may be used to purchase supplies and student salary for the research project.

- *No cost share or matching funds are required.*
- Materials and supplies purchased through this award remain USC Aiken 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**
  - Undergraduate student salary (including fringe benefits)
  - Project supplies (computer software is permitted but NOT computers or peripherals) – *all purchases remain USC Aiken property*
  - Student travel
  - Participant incentives

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

Application Process

Projects can be part of large, on-going research (questions do NOT have to be student generated).

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 one (1)** single-spaced page. References may be on an additional page and are not included in the page limit.
- ☐ *Format*: Use a readable font (Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, Times New Roman) and a font size of 11 points or larger with 0.5 inch margin (top, bottom, left, and right).
- ☐ 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:
  - ☐ Research question or statement
  - ☐ Project description
  - ☐ Project Impact (including how the project is connected to student's academic, personal, or professional goals
  - ☐ Literature cited (*Not included in page limit; can be an extra page*)

☐ Budget (**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 one page proposal. Amount requested must not exceed $3000.
- ☐ PROBe Budget form: https://www.usca.edu/research/undergraduate-research/inbre-probe/

☐ To complete and submit proposal:

NOTE: Do NOT scan your proposal

- ☐ Create **ONE** Word or PDF file named after the student, as follows: "Last Name_First Initial." **Example**: Smith_J_Primer26
- ☐ Go to https://www.usca.edu/research/undergraduate-research/inbre-probe

☐ Complete application form and upload the proposal file.

ONCE AWARDED:
***Primer* Award recipients are *expected* to**

1) Present results at USC Aikens's Scholar Showcase (April 2027)
2) Attend 2027 Summer Scholars Institute weekly meetings
3) Present results at USC Aiken Summer Scholars Institute Symposium (July 2027)

FOR MENTORS

1) Email William Jackson (billj@usca.edu), April DeLaurier (aprild@usca.edu), or Nathan Hancock (nathanh@usca.edu) if you have any questions.

2) *Primer* proposals are not submitted or managed through USCeRA

3) Awards will be made available to the student through existing departmental/school accounts.

4) **Mentors are strongly encouraged to participate in Summer INBRE weekly meetings.** If mentors or mentees do not participate in summer activities that lab may not be eligible for future INBRE funding.

Faculty Steps for successful submission of the *Primer* 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 the Center for Research Excellence website (see link above). The completed proposal should be attached as a single Word or PDF document.
   - The document should contain:
     i. Student's project description
     ii. Budget Form
   - This document should be named: Student last name_first initial (Smith_J_Primer27)
   - Please do not scan. Proposals are acceptable in Word.

Projects involving vertebrate animals, human subjects, or biohazards

For research projects involving vertebrate animals:

- *Primer* 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: human subject research cannot be funded and is therefore not eligible for *Primer* funding.

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. Moreover, the faculty member must have an approved protocol from the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC). Contact William Jackson (billj@usca.edu) to arrange a training session. Research projects involving recombinant DNA must have prior IBC approval.

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 PROBe Review committee. The 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 PROBe webpage):

- Overall merit
- Student's clarity of explanation
  - Research topic or question
  - Project plan or how the question is to be answered
  - Significance or impact of project
  - Writing style

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

Award Administration

Primer awardees are **required** to present their research or research proposal at USC Aiken's Scholar Showcase

Primer awardees are **encouraged** to present 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 pages 3-4). 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 project was supported by grant P20GM103499 (SC INBRE) from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, National Institutes of Health."