



مجلس البحث العلمي
The Research Council

Block Funding Program

Undergraduate Research Grants (URG)

Guidelines

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Introduction

The Undergraduate Research Grants (URG) are awarded to undergraduate students currently enrolled in academic programs in higher education institutions in Oman. These research projects may be conducted either on campus or at other research institutes in the Sultanate. URG funded projects can be, but not necessarily, part of academic courses or graduation projects.

URG grants aim to enable students to explore topics of interest, to gain experience so as to conduct advanced research, scholarly and creative work in the future, and to develop a close academic and professional relationships with faculty members. URG also builds a solid research basis, where the students' learning process is enhanced not only by observation, but actually, by getting personally and proactively engaged in carrying out the research projects; thereby developing a deep understanding of research approaches, theories, methodologies and techniques.

Participation in URG can be a life changing experience as it might transform students' attitude and thinking about research, innovation and careers. This, in turn, not only develops the students professionally, but also positively changes their personalities and motivates them to acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills.

Objectives of the Program

In general, this program aims to:

- Develop a culture of competitive research in Oman
- Enrich undergraduate students' learning experience
- Encourage undergraduates to seek careers in research
- Contribute towards the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Benefits

Undergraduate Students:

The program aims to enable students to:

- gain experience on how to write research proposals and papers
- develop a better and practical understanding of the challenges and difficulties related to research, and thus developing their problem-solving skills and encouraging them to adopt new and creative ideas and methodologies i.e. learning project management skills
- practice and eventually master a number of soft skills, such as, effective planning, persuasion and negotiation skills, time management, team work, communication and presentation skills
- improve the quality and the output of such research by providing the students with financial support

Faculty:

Faculty members, supervising undergraduate students, will be able to:

- interact with students in a research environment
- develop networks with TRC and other researchers in Oman
- identify potential students for postgraduate studies and research
- contribute to research capacity building efforts

Eligibility Criteria

To be considered for URG, an undergraduate research team must first approach a faculty and get his/ her approval to be their Faculty Mentor (FM). The Team may then submit a proposal and compete for TRC's Undergraduate Research Grants (URG). All the details pertinent to this program are available on TRC's webpage. In addition, applications should be submitted and processed on TRC's electronic portal, known as the Research Information Management System (RIMS), available on <https://rims.trc.gov.om>.

Undergraduate Students:

- The team members should be:
 - degree-seeking undergraduate students i.e. enrolled in either a diploma or a bachelor degree in academic institutes in Oman
 - preferably from more than one department/ college/ or university
- Size of each team: 2 - 7 students
- Being enrolled on either full-time or part-time basis
- Overall GPA of each team member should be $\geq 2.30/ 4.00$ (or equivalent)
- All team members should have completed at least the courses of the first year (or the equivalent of one year of credit hours), besides the foundation program, if applicable
- Participating students must be actively enrolled as a minimum for one more academic year so that they have sufficient time to work on and finalize the projects.
- International students studying in higher education institutions in Oman may also apply as research Team Leaders (TL) or Team Members (TM), given that at least 50% of the team members are Omanis.

Faculty:

- The faculty mentor should:
 - be working for a higher education institute in Oman
 - have as a minimum a master degree; or in the case of clinicians hold the position of a senior specialist
- The main role of the mentor is to:
 - guide the research team in formulating a research topic
 - review the write-up of the research proposal, reports and articles
 - provide the students with practical and continuous supervision and guidance throughout the lifespan of the project

Proposals/ Projects:

- Research topics should preferably be interdisciplinary in nature
- The project should be practically manageable within one academic year
- The field/ or the sector of a particular project is determined based on the nature of the project/ work and/or activities to be undertaken during the execution of the project. The field/ sector is NOT determined solely on the basis of the end users or the beneficiaries. For example, if the project is about the designing and manufacturing of a smart wheelchair for people with special needs, the field of this project is engineering and NOT health/ medicine.

Funding Regulations

The funded projects are governed by the following rules:

- The total duration of the project should not exceed one academic year
- The total budget:
 - is capped at OMR 1,500/ project.
 - should be used for expenses directly related to the completion of the project.
 - can be used for the following common categories:
 - materials and supply: e.g. tools, kits, chemicals and glassware
 - equipment
 - data collection/ analysis
 - local travel needed to work on the project
 - administrative costs: e.g. purchasing of literature, use of university facilities & miscellaneous issues
 - Dissemination
 - can be spent as deemed best i.e. there are no caps for categories

- Exclusions:

The budget does NOT cover the cost of the following:

- printing of thesis
- training
- costs associated with presenting the research such as conference registration fees and travel costs to attend conferences

Submission of Applications

Applications are basically divided into two main parts, as follows:

A) Proposal:

The research proposal should ideally include all the following sections:

- Introduction and statement of the problem
- Literature and (where appropriate) patent reviews and analysis of related work
- Objectives
- Methodology: clearly state how you plan to accomplish the project's objectives
- Timeline, together with clear and specific milestones
- Academic, scientific and/or innovation significance
- Benefits to Oman
- References

B) Budget:

- Provide a list of the major categories in the project, for which financial support is required
- Provide the approximate cost as well as a clear justification, i.e. an explanation why a particular amount of money is required, for each category

Evaluation Criteria

Each proposal will be assessed based on the following evaluation criteria:

A) Research Excellence Criteria:

These include the following:

- a- novelty and originality of the research questions
- b- clarity of the proposal
- c- literature and (where appropriate) patent reviews
- d- methodology
- e- significance of the project

B) Expected Impact:

It is well understood that the following criteria will NOT be applicable to all URGs since these projects are usually small in nature, scale and duration. However, and in harmony with other Block Funding Programs, students as well as Institutional Internal Evaluation Committees (IIEC) are highly encouraged to address these points during the formulation and the evaluation of URG proposals:

- Involvement of other researchers e.g. research assistants (technicians and other undergraduate students involved in the project, besides the team members)
- Whether the proposal is addressing challenges related to national priority sectors
- Collaboration with other local/ international institutions (academic, public or private sectors) in terms of, for example, practical participation in conducting the research, or by providing either financial or in-kind contributions. This has to be supported by official documents.
- Applicability and relevance to Oman's socioeconomic development and related public policies

- Number of expected 'peer reviewed' or 'refereed' publications that are going to result from the submitted proposals, even if these take place after the completion of the project and the submission of the final report
- Expected number of Intellectual Properties (IPs) to be created/ obtained

C) Institution-Defined Criteria:

TRC highly encourages Research Institutes (RIs) to develop their own research vision, strategy and priorities. Once this task is successfully accomplished, RIs will be able to come up with additional evaluation criteria, which might vary over time and from one application cycle to the next.

Conflict of Interest

All those involved in the evaluation and/ or administration of URGs should be aware of conflict of interest issues, which include, for instance, the following situations:

- Being a relative to a team member/ or to a faculty mentor
- Being a faculty mentor for any submitted proposal
- Having significant conflicts with any team member/ or with a faculty mentor

The IIEC members should accordingly officially declare the presence or absence of any conflict of interest. If a conflict of interest does exist, the member should be exempted from taking part in the evaluation process of that particular proposal.

Besides, any personnel involved in the screening and evaluation of URG proposals, whether being an employee at TRC or at a research institute, is NOT allowed to become either a team member or a faculty mentor in ANY URG project. This includes, and not limited to, Research Area Managers (RAM) at TRC, Intuitional Research Focal Points, and members of IIEC.

Replacement of Project's Team Members or Faculty Mentor

Replacement of team members e.g. the Team Leader or Faculty Mentor is governed by the following policies:

- It is the responsibility of the RI
- The new members must meet the eligibility criteria for such positions
- The request must be accompanied with the curriculum vitae (CV) of the proposed member and approved by the IRFP of the RI
- It must take place on RIMS

Deliverables

Final Report:

When a project is successfully completed, the Team Leader (TL) should fill in the Final Report form in 'RIMS'. Besides, the TL should also submit a final technical report, similar to a 'thesis', to be attached as a 'Microsoft Word' or a 'PDF' file. IIEC will have to scrutinize the final report. If either the project or the report is incomplete, the final report should be rejected. Final reports are approved only when the team reasonably meets the planned objectives and brings the project to a successful completion. Besides, IRFP should provide TRC with the final statement of the financial expenditures of each project.

When a funding cycle is complete, RIs should then send ONE report on all URG funded projects in that cycle detailing the accomplished KPIs, and paying particular attention to the following:

- The total number of students who participated in and benefited from URGs
- The number of projects successfully completed
- The actual financial expenditures
- Any prizes or awards the projects won, whether locally or internally
- Difficulties encountered in the execution of the projects

TRC audits these reports and the outcomes from a particular RI are used in order to calculate its share of financial support in future cycles.

Participation in TRC's Initiatives:

- URG participants are required to share their research experiences as posters/ models/ or products at TRC's Annual Research Forum as well as whenever TRC requests such participation
- They are also highly encouraged to compete for TRC's Best URG Project Award

A Note to Research Institutes (RIs)

RIs are requested to refer to the main 'Block Funding Guidelines' as all the general institutional guidelines, policies and regulations are also applicable here.