

# Undergraduate Research Redesign Project Plan

## BACKGROUND

The Undergraduate Research Web site is MU's main hub for undergraduate research information and receives between 3,000 and 4,000 visits each month. The site serves three major audience groups: prospective undergraduate researchers, current undergraduate researchers and faculty mentors; as well as several minor groups: prospective MU freshmen, parents and others.

The current site has grown organically over the past three years with several small-scale reorganizations. While the type and quality of the current site content is comparable to other university undergraduate research programs, the organic growth of the site has contributed to organizational problems that have impacted the overall usability of the site. The site could benefit from a thorough content review and reorganization with new content being added to augment the existing materials in some areas.

The current site uses a mix of technologies (HTML tables, PHP includes, PHP/mysql database) that could be better integrated to make the site more accessible and easier to maintain in the future. The database functionality could be improved to include better error checking, spam prevention and easier updates during yearly event cycles.

The Undergraduate Research site redesign provides an opportunity to improve on the current site by augmenting content, improving organization and functionality and putting a more personal face on undergraduate research at MU.

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

*(informational, promotional and functional)*

**Goal 1. Be a "portal" or main information source for undergraduate research for students and faculty. [INFORMATIONAL]**

- **Objective 1:** Better assist students in understanding the many undergraduate research options and choosing which option best fits their needs.
  - **Action:** Improve the "Getting Started" section of the current site. The current section includes example plans for life sciences and social sciences students but no clear steps. *Recommendation:* Revamp this section to be similar to the Boston University UROP "Getting

Started” page: [http://lsurop.missouri.edu/jobs\\_mentor.htm](http://lsurop.missouri.edu/jobs_mentor.htm).

- **Action:** Better differentiate between research jobs and internships by showing different paths students can take to undergraduate research. Some students indicated they were confused by the many options.
- **Objective 2:** Better assist students in finding faculty mentors. One major issue raised by students in the focus groups was the difficulty they experienced identifying potential faculty mentors.
  - **Action:** Provide tips for finding a faculty mentor.
  - **Action:** Add 10 LSUROP faculty mentor profiles to the site.
- **Objective 3:** Beef up supportive information for current undergraduate researchers.
  - **Action:** Add tip sheets for how to write a research abstract and link to WebGURU site with additional tips.
  - **Action:** Add a list of journals that accept submissions from undergraduates.
  - **Action:** Improve list of conferences for undergraduates.

**Goal 2. Better promote undergraduate research at MU. [PROMOTIONAL]**

- **Objective 2A:** Collect, display and promote outstanding student accomplishments (e.g. students winning awards or presenting their work at international conferences).
  - **Action:** Create a “Recognition” section where students can submit their recent awards, presentations or publications. This should include a special place for students traveling with a map showing where students have traveled to present their research around the world. This may include quotes, abstracts and photos.
- **Objective 2B:** Tell the stories of undergraduate researchers at MU.
  - **Action:** Add new profiles of researchers or research projects. Students wanted to see research profiles that were relevant to their research interest areas. This may indicate that a featured research project might be a better option than a featured researcher. (\*Archive old research

profiles.)

- **Action (PHASE 2):** Add alumni profiles to clearly show outcomes of program. (Example: “My undergraduate research experience at MU made it possible for me to get a great graduate fellowship at XXX University.” Or “Without my undergraduate research experience at MU, I wouldn’t have been able to get the great job I have doing XXX today.”)
- **Action (PHASE 2):** Allow students to blog about their research experiences at MU.

**Goal 3. Improve overall functionality of Web site for both users and administrators. [FUNCTIONAL]**

- **Objective A:** Improve site usability for end-users (students and faculty).
  - **Action:** Reorganize site in a user-centered way so that students and faculty can more easily accomplish their key tasks as identified in the “Tasks by Audience” document.
  - **Action:** Improve job submission form by providing standardized job titles and salary ranges instead of one number. Include faculty tips for writing job descriptions. The system should automatically e-mail faculty a reminder after a job has been posted for 30 days and automatically remove the job posting after two months.
  - **Action:** Archive external news stories and press releases.
- **Objective B:** Improve the technical framework of the site so it is more functional, accessible and sustainable.
  - **Action:** Build a standards-compliant site that will be more usable for a wider range of people across many browsers and operating systems.
  - **Action:** Reprogram database-driven areas of the site (abstracts/conference registration, registry, jobs) to include better error checking in forms submission and to facilitate easy updates.
  - **Action:** Prevent spam by requiring students to log in using their PawPrints before submitting information.

- **Objective C:** Give Undergraduate Research staff more access to text areas so that they may make simple updates as needed.
  - **Action:** Migrate non-database areas of the site into the content management system during second phase of project. This will facilitate updates by UGR staff with the added benefit of review and approval workflows. It will also provide a method for students to blog with the same approval processes in place.