



Center for Student Research Annual Report

Academic Year 2024-2025

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Introduction

In its fifth year, the Center for Student Research (CSR) continued to support and elevate student research, scholarship, and creative works across all disciplines at UCCS. We continued efforts to partner with others on campus to enhance attendance at events and reach broader student audiences. This report summarizes the activities, outcomes, and new initiatives undertaken during the 2024–25 academic year.

Graduate Student Grant Writing Boot Camp

In response to growing interest and frequent student requests, the CSR launched its first **Graduate Student Grant Writing Bootcamp** in fall of 2024. This four-week series was designed to equip graduate students in the Graduate Research Academy with introductory skills and knowledge needed to pursue external funding for their research and or graduate education via fellowships. The workshops were modeled after the Grant Writing Bootcamp the UCCS Research Development Coordinator Dr. Kelly McNear runs for faculty each semester, though this workshop covered more basic, introductory information. Facilitated by CSR Director Jennifer Poe and collaborators, the sessions covered grant search engines including Pivot, proposal writing, budgeting, and reviewer expectations of proposals. Students also drafted a brief project summary for an award call relevant to their area of research and engaged in peer-review with one another.

Initial evaluation data from the fall and spring bootcamp sessions indicate that bootcamp was favorably received with 89% of students reporting good to great gains in their knowledge about grant search engines. Further, 100% of attendees reported good to great gains in their understanding of applying SMART goals to developing project summaries and

88% reported good to great gains in how to develop a feasible budget. The CSR director will continue to make improvements to the bootcamp and plans to offer in both fall and spring terms moving forward.

Graduate Student Leadership Development Series

Building on the success of the 2024 pilot, the CSR partnered again with **Dr. L. Lynn Vidler**, Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, to lead a second series of **Graduate Student Leadership Development Workshops** in Spring 2025. The program focused on empowering graduate students through workshops on leadership identity, adaptive challenges, and emotionally safe research environments. A total of eight participants were selected to attend the workshop series out of 90 applicants. They earned a certificate of completion in leadership, and all reported significant gains in confidence to lead effectively in different scenarios. Given the strong interest in this program as evidenced by the 90 applications we received, we hope to expand the program in the future. Scaling this program would benefit from internal or external funding to support speaker stipends and other supplies.

Mountain Lion Research Day (MLRD) 2024

Held on December 6, 2024, the 16th Annual Mountain Lion Research Day (MLRD) featured over 300 attendees and more than 100 student presenters from every academic college. This was a record-breaking attendance for MLRD and speaks to the popularity of this event as a showcase for the incredible work our students and faculty do every year. The event celebrated interdisciplinary research and included the annual closing ceremony with awards for Top Undergraduate and Graduate Scholars and Outstanding Research Mentor of

the Year. Of note, the Undergraduate Top Scholar Todd Collinsworth is a member of the 2025 Undergraduate Research Academy and the Graduate Top Scholar was a former URA student from the 2022 URA cohort. The **MLRD Abstract Book** documented the full list of presenters, abstracts, and faculty mentors, highlighting the collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of research at UCCS. This year's event also featured a strong showing from **Undergraduate Research Academy members**, with 12 presenting their summer research projects.

Undergraduate Research Badges Initiative

In collaboration with the **Associate Dean of Research for the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences**, the CSR Director began development of **Undergraduate Research Badges** to formally recognize student engagement in research and creative works. These digital badges, hosted on platforms like Credly, serve as verified micro-credentials that students can showcase on resumes, LinkedIn profiles, and graduate school applications. Each badge reflects specific competencies and achievements in research, helping students articulate their skills to future employers and academic programs. We proposed a three-tier system of badges to highlight skill development as students gain competencies and experiences over multiple semesters of research and creative work with faculty mentors.

Collaborative Events with Career Center and Graduate School

The CSR partnered with the **Career Center** and the **Graduate School Recruiter** to host two major events aimed at supporting student pathways into research and graduate education

1. Stepping on the Road to Graduate School



This event provided practical guidance on preparing for graduate education, including timelines, application strategies, and funding opportunities. A panel of **Aspirational Graduate Peer Mentors** shared insights into the graduate student experience, offering attendees a candid look at academic life beyond the undergraduate years.

2. Stepping on the Road to Research



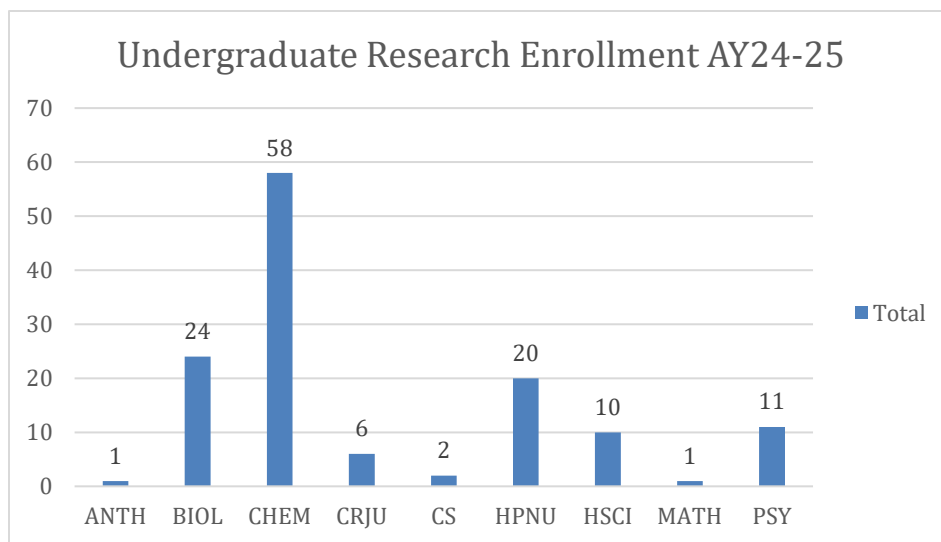
Designed especially for **first-generation and early-career students**, this event introduced the value of research and creative work in shaping academic and professional trajectories. Students learned how to get involved in research, connect

with faculty mentors, and explore opportunities like the Undergraduate Research Academy.

Both events were well-attended with 10-15 attendees and received positive feedback, reinforcing the importance of early engagement and peer mentorship in student success. The CSR intends to continue collaborations with the Career Center and the Graduate School recruiter in the coming academic year.

Enhanced Data Tracking of Student Outcomes

The CSR expanded efforts to track long-term outcomes of URA participants across cohorts. The CSR director developed a centralized form to collect tangible student outcomes as reported by faculty mentors. While efforts are still underway to gather information, some initial key outcomes include: twelve peer-reviewed publications, nine non-peer-reviewed outputs, 20 conference presentations, and 19 students reported graduate school acceptances, internships, or career placements. Furthermore, the CSR is working with the Office of Institutional Research to update other longer-term outcome data for URA students including their GPA average in comparison to non-URA peers, their graduation rates, and



their matriculation
to graduate
programs. This
continued and
improved data
tracking
strengthens CSR's
ability to advocate

for continued investment in undergraduate research.

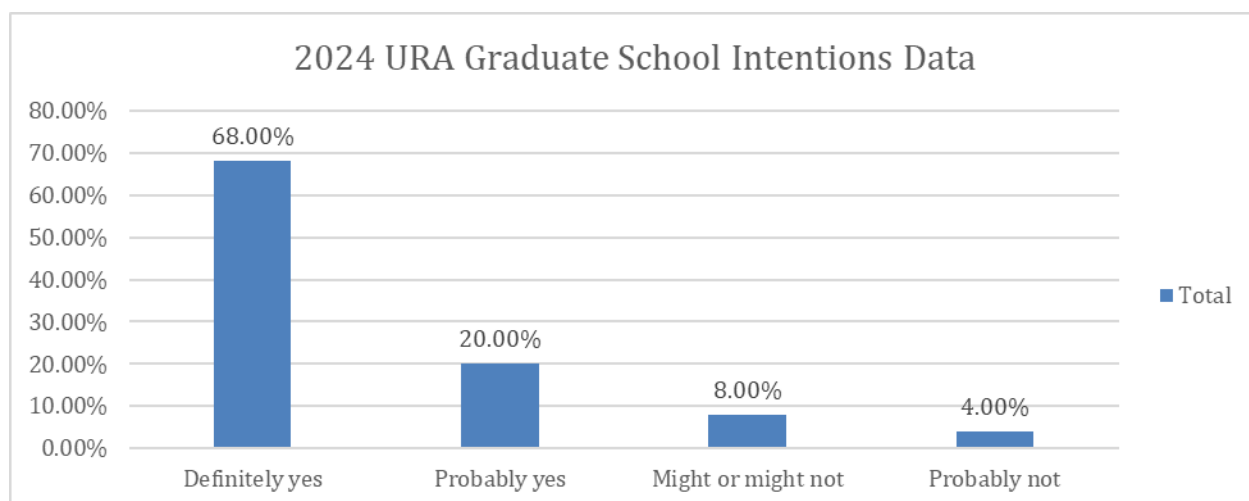
We also continued to track student enrollment in the **Undergraduate Research and Creative Works** course offering. During the 2024-25 AY, there were 134 students enrolled in this course or its equivalent. As in years past, the greatest number of enrollments were in Chemistry and Biology departments, followed by Human Physiology and Nutrition and Psychology. While there was a significant dip in enrollment the previous year (69 students in AY23-24), enrollment rebounded this year to match the 2023 academic year numbers. The CSR will continue to advertise the 9499 course option directly to departments, students and through the academic advising office.

2024 URA Student Exit Survey Highlights



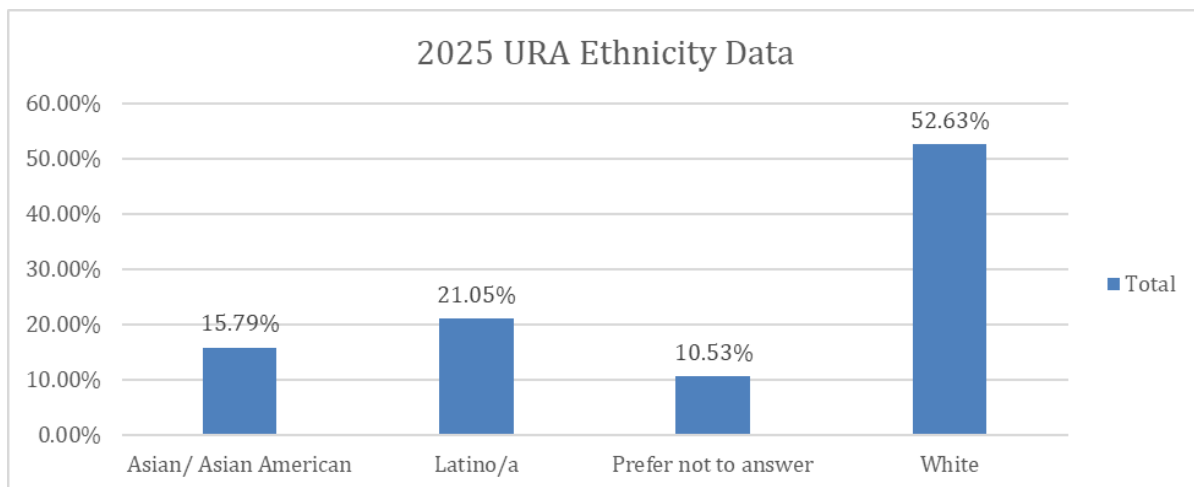
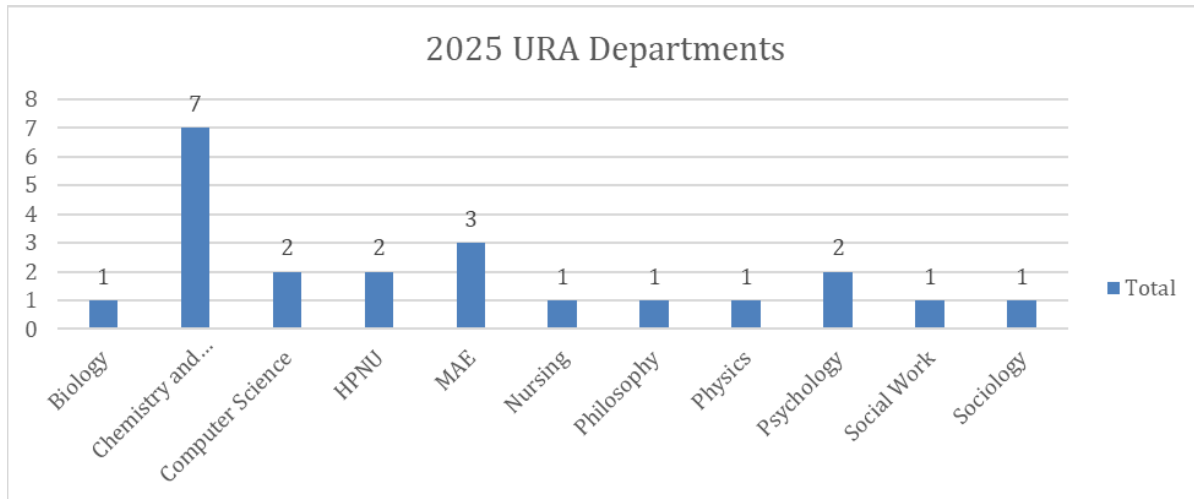
The 2024 cohort of the Undergraduate Research Academy (URA) at UCCS demonstrated strong engagement and meaningful outcomes through their participation in faculty-mentored research. Of the 24 students

who completed the program's exit survey, 15 reported having already presented their research at academic conferences. An additional seven students indicated plans to present in the near future, while two are actively seeking appropriate venues to share their work. These presentations reflect the program's emphasis on scholarly dissemination and professional development.



Students reported significant gains in core research competencies, including critical thinking, data analysis, and scholarly communication. Many also expressed a strengthened sense of researcher identity and increased confidence in their ability to conduct independent research. The majority rated both their mentorship experience and the overall program as “excellent,” highlighting the value of close faculty guidance. Notably, students cited the research stipend, mentorship, and opportunities to present their work as the most impactful aspects of the program. Importantly, the URA cohort reported a strong likelihood of pursuing graduate education (88% probably or definitely applying to graduate school in the next year), underscoring the program’s role in shaping future scholars.

The current URA cohort for 2025 includes a wide array of disciplines and a slightly more representative ethnic makeup as well. Though chemistry and biochemistry continue to have the greatest number of awardees, there was also representation from the College of Public Service, the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, as well as from departments such as Philosophy and Physics which do not typically have many applicants. This year’s cohort showed a strong increase in the number of Latinx students participating, more closely reflecting the higher Hispanic population at UCCS (an emerging Hispanic-serving institution). Finally, nearly 32% of the 2025 cohort is a first-generation college student. Continuing to increase awareness and provide resources to students interested in mentored research and creative work experiences will hopefully ensure we continue to recruit future URA cohort that reflect our broader campus community.



Student Reflections on the URA Experience

Selected student comments:

What was the most valuable aspect of your research experience?

“It reinforced my desire to go to graduate school and pursue more research opportunities.”

"It gave me credible evidence that I have worked in the lab on research and understand how to interact with human subjects.”

“My research experience provided valuable insight into what a career in academia might look like and what a job in full-time research might entail. At first it made me more hesitant but as I gained more confidence in the process it made me more excited to pursue that path.”

“I was already considering doing my master's, but this experience along with working with my wonderful mentor made to consider more research focused schools. Additionally, this experience has allowed me to consider pursuing research as a career rather than something to do just when I am in school.”

“I think presenting my research to people was a big deal to me. It was something that I worked on for so long and it was amazing to be able to share that with other members of the scientific community and anyone who would listen.”

“Game-design-focused research is a very underdeveloped field, with very few publications analyzing video games' potential positive effects. The URA gave me the feeling that my field of research had more validity despite how small it is, and it gave me the opportunity to meet new people just as passionate about their research that allowed us to share our experiences in research, fueling each other's' passion for our work.”

Broader URA Outcomes

Data gathered from the Office of Institutional Research provides a longer-range picture of outcomes for students participating in the Undergraduate Research Academy program. The prior six years of URA cohorts were analyzed regarding their final GPA, graduation rates, and matriculation to graduate school. Findings show that those participating in the URA have 14% higher GPAs ($M = 3.27$) compared to non-URA peers ($M = 3.27$). Further, URA students have an 81% higher graduation rate (78%) compared to their non-URA peers (43%). URA students are also twice as likely to matriculate to graduate school compared to those that do not participate in the URA. **Importantly, nearly 50% of URA students matriculate to a graduate program at UCCS.** This suggests undergraduate research participation at our institution is a useful avenue to retain students for further studies after completing their bachelor degree.

Looking Ahead

Despite a year marked by uncertainty in federal funding and shifting national research priorities, the Center for Student Research remains steadfast in its mission to cultivate a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient research culture at UCCS. The accomplishments of the 2024–25 academic year, ranging from the successful launch of new programs to the continued growth of student participation and outcomes, demonstrate the enduring value of student research and creative work in shaping academic and professional futures.

The challenges we face have only underscored the importance of investing in student potential. As external funding landscapes evolve, our commitment to innovation, collaboration, and equity in research remains unwavering. We are inspired by the passion, curiosity, and perseverance of

our students, and we are confident that their contributions will continue to enrich our campus and broader communities.

Looking ahead, the CSR will continue to seek new partnerships, advocate for sustainable support, and expand opportunities that empower students to explore, discover, and lead. With the collective efforts of faculty mentors, campus collaborators, and institutional leadership, we are building a future where research is not only accessible, but transformative, for every student at UCCS.