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S.P.U.R.

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Not so long ago, an undergraduate who wanted to be involved in research had little choice but to seek out a position in a lab where he or she spent the majority of the time cleaning pipettes or filing papers. Today, undergraduate research is not so limited to the busy-work that precludes actual research experience. The goal of S.P.U.R., the Society for the Promotion of Undergraduate Research, is to make students aware of this change.

S.P.U.R. seeks to find placements for students interested in undergraduate research. Specifically, we wish to help students find a lab within their area of interest, find a mentor, and discover the wealth of opportunities that exist for undergraduates.

We are a group of students with one thing in common: motivation. We are motivated to succeed and we realize the benefits of being proactive. These qualities are the main driving force behind S.P.U.R. The club is relatively new among the student organizations existing at UK; it was founded in August of 2004.

The basis for S.P.U.R.'s philosophy stemmed from my own research experiences here at UK. I have received tremendous help and encouragement from the office of Undergraduate Research (UKURP). Among the various assistance I received, they supported my trip to Orlando, Florida, last year to attend a research conference, not to mention they provided me with the resources I needed to find a lab in the first place. I decided that a student organization dedicated to research would complement the efforts made by the Undergraduate Research Program to encourage student research involvement. Now, UKURP is one of the main sources of support and funding for S.P.U.R.

Perhaps the most attractive aspect of this society is the diversity that it encompasses. This past year, our members included biology, chemistry, psychology, history, physics, and mathematics majors. We encourage all fields of study to be involved, because research is certainly not limited to the natural sciences. Various opportunities are offered by every department here at UK; the matter really just lies in the student’s own hands. The experiences gained from using one’s own resources is immeasurable when it comes time to apply for graduate school, medical school, or some other professional program.

S.P.U.R. encourages students from all majors to be involved; you never know what you might come across that you otherwise may not have seen. We like to meet no more than twice a month, which is a reflection of the busy schedules that most of us have. We usually have pizza once a month at the regular meetings, at which we discuss issues with the club, plan events for the semester, and mostly just socialize. The other meeting each month is dedicated to either a guest speaker or some sort of “field trip.”

Last year, among the various meetings, we toured Dr. Robin Cooper’s lab, where we got a taste of synaptic transmission and neuromodulation in crayfish. We also toured the DLAR (Division of Laboratory Animal Research), where Dr. Kenneth Dickey, the director of the facility and head veterinarian, gave us an interesting background discussion on animal research at UK. Also, an MD/PhD student came to talk to us about the MD/PhD program offered by UK and answered many questions that the students had concerning the program.

This year, we have many exciting events planned. One of the main events to look forward to is the “Undergraduate Showcase” scheduled for the April 25, 2006. This will be a symposium held for undergraduates so that students from all majors can present their work, whether it be posters, projects, papers, performances, etc. We are working with representatives from all departments to give every student a chance to participate. It is a great opportunity for students; especially for those who will already be doing some sort of project for a class. I hope to see you there and at a future S.P.U.R. meeting. Visit us at www.uky.edu/eureka/spur/home.html.