

HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY
THE PREMIER LIFE SKILLS UNIVERSITY

Undergraduate Research and Creative Works

SPOTLIGHT

The Official Newsletter for Undergraduate Research & Creative Works



MISSION STATEMENT

The Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Works mission is to bring together undergraduate students and faculty members for the purpose of creating unique and collaborative projects. By fostering an imaginative research experience, we hope to promote the development of new competencies, encourage critical thinking skills, inspire students to add to the global sum of human knowledge, and help students develop the skills to be competitive in the marketplace.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM URCW!

URCW would like to welcome all of our students and faculty members back to campus! Our office hopes you had a restful winter break, a slow start to the spring semester, and that you're just as excited to jump back into the new year as we are. Featured in this January issue of *Spotlight* are a number of important announcements and highlights from this month, including student projects on campus, application deadlines, and conference highlights!

SUBMIT YOUR ABSTRACTS FOR HIGH-PURCS 2026!

HPU undergraduate students from all disciplines on campus are invited to participate in HPU's 14th annual Research and Creativity Symposium (High-PURCS) on **April 14th, 2026** from 8am to 2pm! This event will showcase student scholarship in a supportive environment that models a professional venue. Students may choose to present their work as a poster, oral presentation, brief performance, or exhibit. Last year's symposium welcomed 424 presenters from 30 different disciplines, 241 exhibited projects, and 90 faculty mentors—don't miss your opportunity to be a part of this year's impressive crew! Abstract submissions are open and will close on **March 14th, 2026**. Save the date!



Scan the QR code to the right to submit to High-PURCS!



APPLY FOR SUMMER RESEARCH NOW!

In need of summer plans that give you the chance to gain experience in your field, learn new skills, and build meaningful connections with mentors and fellow researchers? Apply for one of URCW's summer research programs! URCW offers three research opportunities each summer (see details below). Participants spend 8 weeks on campus and receive free housing, meals, and a small stipend. Check out



our September 2025 issue of Spotlight to read testimonials from past summer research participants and see what makes the summer research experience so impactful! Applications are open now and close on **March 1st, 2026**.



SuRI

SuRI is open to undergraduates in all academic disciplines. Students work with a faculty mentor to define the project goal, method, and timeline.

SuRPS

SuRPS is a competitive program offering predetermined research projects in biology, chemistry, or physics with faculty mentors.

SuRF

CHSH-SuRF is a competitive program offering hands-on research assistant positions with Health Sciences faculty across multiple fields.

PROJECTS IN PROFILE: DR. PEXA'S TEAM!

"Projects in Profile" features a group of students in every issue of *Spotlight* who are doing incredible work in research or creative work that deserves to be HYPED! This month, we're highlighting Dr. Brett Pexa's group of student researchers who are exploring how to understand performance factors in college athletes and support ACL-injury prevention efforts.

This group of students conducts comprehensive testing across the women's soccer, men's soccer, women's basketball, and women's lacrosse teams at HPU. Their assessment methods include conducting wellness surveys and evaluating athletic movements such as countermovement jumps, reaction-time evaluations, force-plate analysis, running tests, and cutting-movement data.

Together, this data-driven approach helps inform safer training strategies and advance injury-prevention research for collegiate athletes. URCW is impressed by the hard work and dedication of this group of students, and appreciates the example they are setting across campus and beyond!



Back row (from left to right): Will Toth, Molly McCarver, Isabelle Lee (graduated) Brett Pexa, Brian Shaw, Garrett Hess (biomechanics research engineer)

Front row (from left to right): Niyah Williams (graduated), Jillian Schulz (summer team), Kiah Williams (graduated), Allie Pratt, Noah Rauch

Not pictured: Gavin Frey, Graeme White, Jak Kilzi

Want Your Research Hyped?



Would you like to see your research team featured in an upcoming issue of *Spotlight*? Simply scan the QR code to the left and complete the short form to share details about your project and your team. We'd love the opportunity to highlight your work and celebrate the impact you're making, so don't hesitate to reach out!

GAVIN FREY

Class of 2027
Exercise Science Major,
Psychology Minor



"Getting to use industry-standard tools and equipment while also working with high-caliber athletes is what excites me most about the research we're doing."



Will Toth performs a counter-movement jump in the Health and Human Performance Biomechanics Lab.

ALLIE PRATT

Class of 2027
Exercise Science & Business
Administration Major



"I am very grateful to have the opportunities to work with various D1 athletics, run tests on their activity, and present our findings at research conferences."



Dr. Pexa, Garrett Hess, and their research team test cutting, forces-plate data, and speed in athletes in the Markerless Motion Capture Lab.

WILL TOTH

Class of 2027
Exercise Science Major



"I enjoy engaging with athletes in a laboratory environment and gaining a deeper understanding of factors that contribute to increased and reduced risk of lower extremity injuries."

STUDENT RECIPIENTS OF GRANTS FROM URCW

URCW is proud to award grants to students and faculty mentors who plan to present their research and creative works at disciplinary conferences, as well as to students who are continuing to develop their current projects alongside their mentor. Congratulations to all of the grant recipients listed below—we are excited to see your impact through these experiences within your fields and beyond!

- 1. Rilee Bahner, Luke Bantamoi, Natalie Malozeic, John Marsh, and Kayley Simon** to present at the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology 2026 Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado mentored by Dr. Jeremy Whitson.
- 2. Will Battle, Noah Bernabe, Daniel Bourbonnais, James Branford, Zach Chodash, Michael Connelly, Dylan Daner, Luke Fixari, Damien Gross, Luke Harless, Jaden Harnar, Sean Heenan, Amaris Jenkins, Brad Killian, Josh Mancini, Mark Metcalf, Bonnie Ni, Franky Ortiz, Clara Owen, Ashley Poteat, Luis Robles Delgado, McConnico Sharpe, Riley Siegel, Maggie Underwood, Erica Williams, and Nate Zapata** to present at the Game Developer's Conference in San Francisco, California accompanied by Assistant Professor of Game Design Brian Heagney.
- 3. Gabriela Lowe** to aid her research for her project “Effect of Creatine on Mitochondrial Biogenesis, Dynamics, and Function in Cultured Myotubes” mentored by Dr. Roger Vaughan.
- 4. Sydney Ryan** to to aid her research for her project “Phase-Specific Auditory Stimulation: A Closed-Loop System Linking Cellular Responses and Human EEG Entrainment” mentored by Dr. Michael Grider.
- 5. Harlie Culbreth, Isabella Frankovic, and Alexandra Shutters** to present at the Society for Sports Neuroscience Conference at Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Florida mentored by Dr. Bill Kochen.
- 6. Zaria Owens, Gracie Ritchey, Nick Sorenson, and Jessie Vozar** to present at the 2026 American Physiological Society Summit in Minneapolis, Minnesota mentored by Dr. Jason Keeler and Dr. Matthew Kuennen.

Apply for the SIRG Grant!

Applications are now being accepted for the URCW Scholarly Interdisciplinary Research Grant (SIRG). Students who work with at least two different mentors across two different disciplines in research and/or creative works are eligible to receive this grant. The award is up to \$1000 and can be used for necessary supplies and/or travel for fieldwork. Applications are due by **February 15th**. Scan the QR code to visit our website, learn more, and apply today!



URCW-FUNDED TRIP SENDS MUSIC STUDENTS TO NATS REGIONALS

URCW is honored to award grants that create opportunities for students to travel to conferences, presentations, performances, and symposiums that support their growth as researchers, presenters, and performers. In this issue of *Spotlight*, we are excited to report on the experiences of a group of students mentored by Jaclyn Surso who attended a competition hosted by The National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) in November 2025. NATS is a world-renowned organization that strives to create competitions and auditions where young singers feel that they have a safe and secure place to express themselves, perform new repertoire, and receive feedback from judges who are professional musicians.

These students—who come from a variety of disciplines on campus—practiced, prepared, memorized, and worked on characterization for many weeks. Students received feedback which helped them understand where they stand on their individual path while also giving them ideas to pursue in future lessons, performances and competitions.

Eleven students competed in the NC Chapter of NSAT at UNC Charlotte and had exceptional results in both the Musical Theater and Contemporary categories. Multiple students placed in their category and qualified for the regional competition which takes place in Maryland in March 2026. URCW congratulates each of these students on their accomplishments and is proud to support their continued growth as scholars and artists!



**CONGRATULATIONS AND
GOOD LUCK TO THE
FOLLOWING STUDENTS
MOVING ON TO REGIONALS!**

Quinn Fergusson
Dani Hoecker
Ella Marron
Ashley Mullens
Madeleine Rubino
Gabriella Vitelli
Alyssa Vogt
Hailey White

Read below to learn how students are applying what they gained at NATS to future creative projects and performances:



ASHLEY MULLENS

Class of 2028 | Biology Major on a Pre-Med track, English Literature Minor

“As a biology major, it’s really nice to be able to branch out, stay involved in the arts, and continue to develop as a musician despite my major being so time consuming. Qualifying for regionals taught me to never doubt myself or the quality of my practice. I can’t wait for regionals!”



ALYSSA VOGT

Class of 2026 | Theatre and Music Major

“This was my first time attending NATS, so it was very rewarding to see my technique applauded by the judges with a score of 95.33. That said, it was also informative on just how competitive it is for singers that my score still only put me in third place.”



STUDENT IN PROFILE: MEIGS ROBERTS

In each issue for this spring semester, we're highlighting students from various fields who have accomplished remarkable work during their undergraduate experience at HPU, starting with Meigs Roberts! Meigs (Class of 2026) is a Hospitality Management major with a minor in Event Management. During his undergraduate experience, Meigs has conducted research alongside his mentors Dr. Marisa Ritter, Dr. Jessica Wiitala, and Dr. Brianna Clark. His research examined how the use of AI in cruise itinerary planning affects brand awareness, brand engagement, and ultimately brand loyalty, and how these effects may differ based on cruise line category and consumers' comfort with technology. He presented his findings at the 30th Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism in Houston, Texas, as well as High-PURCS 2025.

“URCW played an important role in my research experience by providing the structure, resources, and mentorship that allowed me to engage in meaningful academic research beyond standard coursework. Through URCW, I gained hands-on experience, networking opportunities, developed confidence as a researcher, and learned how to apply classroom knowledge to real-world academic research.” *- Meigs on how URCW shaped his research experience at HPU*

When asked what accomplishments made him most proud over the past four years, Meigs shared that being one of only a few undergraduate students to present at the 30th Annual Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism stood out to him. Meigs credits his mentors with having a significant impact on his research experience. “Dr. Ritter definitely shaped my research experience by introducing me to a level of academic research that extended far beyond the classroom. Through higher expectations, I learned how to approach research with greater depth, rigor, and intentionality. This experience challenged me to think more critically, learn to ask deeper questions, and engage with research in a way that felt both meaningful and professional.” After graduation, Meigs intends to enter the cruise industry, where he hopes to become a cruise director. URCW is proud to have supported his impressive achievements during his time at HPU and looks forward to celebrating all that he accomplishes in the years ahead!



Meigs Roberts presents his research on AI usage in cruise itinerary planning at the Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research Conference in Hospitality and Tourism.



Meigs smiles for a photo at High-PURCS 2025 where he presents his research on AI usage in cruise itinerary planning.

APPLY FOR THE CUR GRANT

Calling all Biology students! The CUR Travel Grant—an award of up to \$250—is offered to students who are undergraduates to help attend a discipline-specific meeting and enable interactions with primary researchers within that discipline. Students who apply must have a mentor who is a CUR member, or attend an institution that holds CUR institutional membership (HPU holds CUR institutional membership). Scan the QR code below to learn more and apply!



**DEADLINE
TO APPLY:
FEBRUARY
13TH, 2026**

JANUARY RESEARCH ROOKIE OF THE MONTH: THOMAS SHAH

We're excited to announce our January Research Rookie, Thomas Shah! Thomas is a Political Science major with a minor in Legal Studies. When asked how Research Rookies has been meaningful to him, Thomas said, "The Research Rookies program has meant a great deal to me in the short amount of time I have been able to participate in it. The program has provided strong



THOMAS SHAH

preparation for my future as a student interested in research, while also equipping me with practical skills that will support me throughout my academic journey and beyond. I am beyond grateful for this program and I hope more people recognize the value of participating in it." Congratulations on this accomplishment, Thomas!

ARE YOU FOLLOWING US YET?

Want grant opportunities, event updates, and program deadlines right in your feed? Follow URCW on social media! We're active on Instagram and Facebook and share everything you need to make the most of your research and creative work at HPU. Plus, you might even be featured! Check out the information to the right to find us.



LET'S KEEP IN TOUCH!



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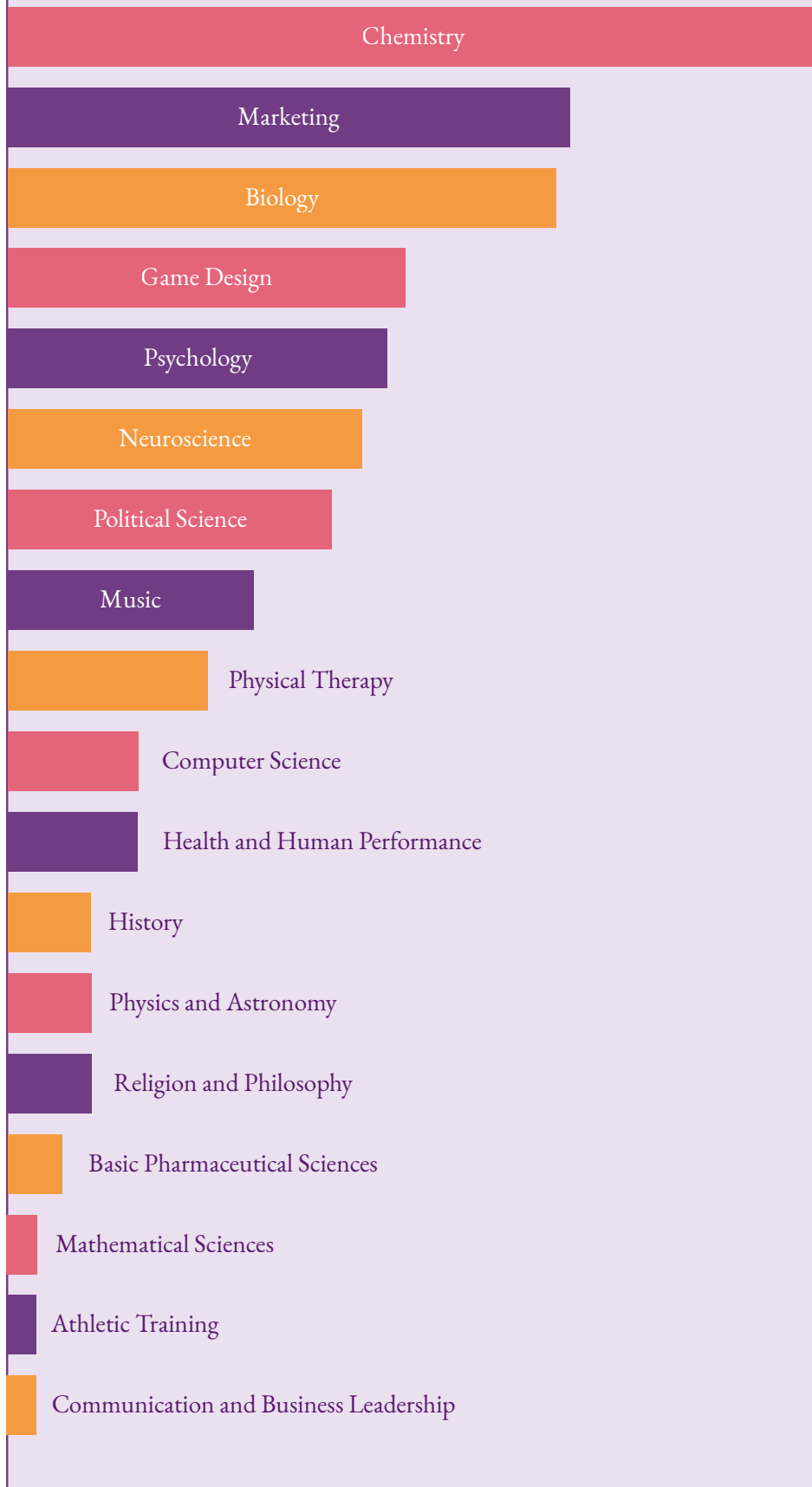


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STUDENTS IN RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WORKS

From the URCW Registry



ARE YOU COUNTED?

URCW tracks the number of students who are undertaking new research and creative projects across all disciplines at High Point University. By registering your work with URCW, you not only contribute to highlighting the achievements of your department, but also help us record the diverse creative works happening on campus. This allows us to reach out with valuable resources relevant to your goals and endeavors! Sign up on the registry if you are:

1. Collaborating or assisting with faculty members' academic research or creative work
2. Pursuing your own independent projects that are mentored by a faculty member
3. Further developing research or creative work done in class into a presentation or exhibit for a broader audience

Scan the QR Code below to register your research and creative works!

