**Undergraduate Research Office, Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences (FMHS)**

Research has shown that the research outputs of undergraduates can be increased by facilitating access to support and resources, and providing appropriate training in research methodology. This, together with the concerted efforts of a handful of staff and students within the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) at Stellenbosch University, led to the establishment of the Undergraduate Research Office in the FMHS – a development that was made possible by SURMEPI funding. The support from FMHS management for this initiative, aimed at strengthening undergraduate research in the Faculty, is demonstrated by their commitment to permanently fund the post that was created to establish and manage the Undergraduate Research Office (URO). In January 2015, with the appointment of Debbie Marais as the new head of the URO, a fourth office was added to the three existing offices in the Research Development and Support Division (RDSD) of the FMHS:

Grants Management

Health Research Ethics

Capacity Development & Funding

Undergraduate Research

RDSD

NEW

The objective of the Undergraduate Research Office (URO) is to create a one-stop service point to support research undertaken by all undergraduate students in the FMHS. This will be done through three core activities: strengthening research capacity, providing funding, and facilitating ethics review of undergraduate research applications. Three support functions underpin these core activities: i) coordinating undergraduate research and support for research across the FMHS, ii) advocating for fostering and supporting undergraduate research in the FMHS and beyond, and iii) conducting research on the process of setting up the URO, as well as on the nature of undergraduate research-related needs and outputs.

**Goals of the Undergraduate Research Office, established January 2015**

Core Functions

Funding

Ethics Review

Research Capacity

Support Functions

The primary goal of this office is to equip students to be better researchers. Therefore, in addition to knowing how to conduct research, they should know how to access and apply for funding, and know how to apply for ethical approval, as well as conduct research ethically.

* **Research capacity**

As described above, research in the FMHS varies from a structured, compulsory component integrated into a degree programme, to an optional, voluntary undertaking outside of degree requirements. The URO will provide resources and services at varying levels of support to accommodate the needs of students across the Faculty. This will entail developing generic research-related resources alongside more tailor-made resources that address the specific requirements of different departments and students conducting research within these departments.

* **Funding**

To encourage and incentivise undergraduate research, the URO will identify sources of funding that are either directly or indirectly aimed at supporting undergraduate research in medical and health sciences. All funding provided through this office will be linked to increasing research outputs, specifically in the form of publications and presentations.

* **Ethics review**

All research in the FMHS has to go through the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for ethical approval. Due to time constraints on the completion of undergraduate research, this places particular demands on the ethics review committee office. A third core component of the URO’s functions will thus be to facilitate ethics review of undergraduate research, both through fast tracking the review of such applications by contributing additional review capacity to HREC, and by making the ethics application process an educational experience for undergraduate students through providing one-on-one consultations and informational materials.

**Contact**

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