

IMPERIAL COLLEGE UNION

UNION COUNCIL PAPER

Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme

Proposer:

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Union Notes

1. Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP) is an incredible opportunity for undergraduate students who wish to experience the research environment and develop skills that will further their appreciation for their field of study.
2. As STEM students, Imperial undergraduates particularly benefit from such a scheme, which helps them develop skills and become competitive applicants in a range of post-graduate destinations - be it graduate studies, industry, etc.
3. While every undergraduate student can, in theory, undertake a UROP experience upon agreement with a faculty member, many of them depend on funding sources (like the UROP bursary scheme) to handle the expenses of living in London for the duration of the research experience.
4. There is only a very limited number of UROP bursaries awarded to students every year. While some students opt to handle expenses on their own, a significant portion do not have that privilege, thus giving up a research opportunity to do paid work instead.
5. There are currently no clear selection criteria for a successful UROP bursary application - is it based on academic performance, project, quality of writing, supervisor statement?
6. It is particularly challenging for new PIs to finance UROPs using their own funds; yet they are often also those who benefit the most from UROP students while providing high quality supervision (small labs, more time, etc).

Union Believes

1. A research internship is an integral part of a STEM education.
2. There is an already existing socio-economic gap between students who need to work in summer to support themselves financially and those who do not, which is reflected in the demographic of students that can afford to do research without the support of the UROP bursary.
3. The application process and criteria as they stand are completely intransparent to staff and students alike

Union Resolves

Lobby the college to resolve the issue by taking the following actions:

1. Given the evident benefits of a UROP experience in the training of a STEM student, the college should ensure this opportunity is made more accessible to students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.
2. Funding for UROP bursaries should be increased in response to the number of students who want to pursue this opportunity. Below we propose a non-exhaustive list of potential sources and courses of action:
 - Allocating funding from tuition fees. This will hopefully open a discussion on how tuition fees are currently used, and whether there is scope for such a shift
 - A reallocation of the UROP bursaries, i.e., reducing the funding for remote projects who do not necessarily have to stay in London, so that a higher number of students can be supported
 - Encouraging labs to allocate more funding for undergraduate students
 - Offering subsidised accommodation to UROP students during the summer period
 - Departmental funding
 - Alumni donations
3. Introduce funding schemes aimed specifically at low-income students.
 - Ask students to indicate whether they rely on funding to pursue the UROP
4. Make the selection criteria transparent to students and academics.
5. Launch a thorough review of the UROP bursary application process - starting from the application questions (which frequently overlap), selection criteria, who decides the outcome, etc.
 - Proposed to be conducted via a special committee, with the input of staff at the level of college, faculty, department, as well as officer trustees and student representatives
6. Offer increased support at a departmental level to guide the students and supervisors in the application process.

- Introduce a repository where supervisors publish UROP projects, alongside funding information
7. Offer increased support and incentivise new PIs to take UROP students by allocating fixed funding for 1-2 UROPs per year for the first few years.