



Council on Undergraduate Research
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April 20, 2015

The Honorable Lamar Smith
The Honorable Eddie Bernice Johnson
Committee on Science, Space and Technology
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson:

As you and your colleagues consider the *America COMPETES Reauthorization Act of 2015* (H.R.1806), the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) urges you to carefully craft changes that affect the agencies and programs that support high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship and reconsider some of the current bill's proposals.

Undergraduate research is an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline. The more than 10,000 members and close to 1,000 institutions that belong to CUR believe that the best way to capture student interest and create enthusiasm for a discipline is through research in close collaboration with faculty members. Federal investments in research support this endeavor broadly and the FIRST Act affects the prospects of undergraduate research on campuses nationwide.

HR 1806 includes several proposals that CUR and its colleagues in the research and education advocacy community find troubling. In particular, CUR agrees with many other scientific and research organizations that argue that to encourage the most innovative science, the U.S. scientific enterprise must remain insulated from political and ideological pressure. Individual directorate authorizations concern CUR greatly. Not only do they raise questions about the propriety of Congressional influence on the Foundation's grant making authority, they would also have adverse effects on the peer review process that is the hallmark of that agency's crucial innovations and on interdisciplinary research.

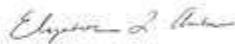
Further, CUR is disappointed that the current version of the bill does not reflect the importance of undergraduate research in efforts to encourage success and persistence in college and spark interest in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) fields. Undergraduate research has been cited by numerous national reports and experts, including the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, as a powerful strategy for increasing student retention in degree programs and

boosting student graduation rates, particularly for students who sometimes struggle in higher education. Undergraduate research is an effective practice that supports multiple national policy goals for several reasons: (1) it increases students' level of professional aspiration, (2) it builds core competencies in the skills valued in the workplace and (3) it connects students with mentors. HR 1806 does not reflect the practice's important role in reaching these goals.

Increasingly, voices expressing support for undergraduate research are coming from outside of academe. Business, industry, and governmental entities (including defense) are sectors that are increasingly engaged in directing undergraduate education pathways, particularly in the STEM disciplines. Nations vigorously compete and strive to take full advantage of a complex, globally-interconnected economy fueled by bringing research rapidly to market. In this emerging context, undergraduate research has now been officially "discovered," and touted as a critical element in individual, institutional and national achievement. Simply put, HR 1806 ignores the importance of undergraduate research in the agencies and programs it addresses. CUR looks forward to working with you and your colleagues in the Senate to increase the profile of undergraduate research in legislation that reauthorizes the America COMPETES Act and affects the federal research agencies.

If you or your staff have any questions about CUR, undergraduate research or federal policies that affect the practice, please call me at 202-783-4810, extension 201, or contact me at eambos@cur.org. Thank you for your attention to these views.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Ambros
Executive Officer

cc: Members of the Science, Space and Technology Committee