

Directions for Using Bio REU URSSA – Summer 2010 Pilot Study

With input from the BIO REU site directors and the researchers who developed URSSA, we have prepared a common version of the URSSA (Undergraduate Research Student Self-Assessment) online survey for BIO REU sites to use this summer with your students. URSSA is a research-based, scientifically developed survey tool (“instrument”) that measures students’ gains from participating in undergraduate research (UR) in a range of areas including intellectual growth, skills, personal benefits, professional preparation and career clarification. It also probes key aspects of students’ UR experiences that we know contribute to these gains, and basic demographic variables.

Follow these instructions to access this common (“master”) version of the BIO URSSA instrument and make a site-specific copy to use with your own students. You must use the common set of 23 questions, but you have the option to customize the survey, for instance to ask about particular program activities or components. We have retained several of URSSA’s optional questions on program activities, which you can keep, delete, or modify; you can also add your own sub-questions or question blocks. The survey takes students 15-20 minutes, depending on how much they write, so you are advised to keep your additions to a minimum. For reference, the file, *Summer2010BioREU_FullAssessment.pdf*, shows the required questions (#1-10 and #19-31 in this version) and some optional questions (#11-18) that you can retain, delete, or modify. The file, *Summer2010BioREU_CoreAssessment.pdf*, shows only the required questions. Please refer to these documents if you get confused about which questions are which. Questions #19-31 include 5 questions under the header “Research background,” 3 questions under the header “Academic background,” and 5 questions under “Demographics.” Your own copy of the survey will have a different instrument number.

You may wish to add other assessment activities for your students in addition to this survey. For example, you could have students write a short summary of their project for a non-science specialist. Questions like these are not included in URSSA because they compromise students’ anonymity, and because they cannot be interpreted without detailed knowledge of the students’ projects, but they can be very informative to you at your own site. You could host an informal conversation with students about what they have learned over the summer—dialogue among students can prompt insights for them and you alike. It can be interesting to ask students what the “best” and “worst” parts of their summer research experience were.

A note about language: The web platform for URSSA was originally developed for a classroom instrument, the SALG (Student Assessment of their Learning Gains). URSSA is, like SALG, a learning gains instrument, but it is developed to measure student outcomes from undergraduate research experiences, not classroom learning. However, you will encounter language that is based on the classroom situation: As an REU site director, you will be referred to as an “instructor” on the web site, and you will be using an instrument created for the BIO REU “department.” Your “course name” might be “REU program” and the “course description” should contain identifiers for your own program.

Set-up instructions

1. You must first sign in or create a new account on the instructor site (www.salgsite.org).
2. Under *Department affiliation* click on “BIO REU, University of Colorado.”

3. Click “Create a new... Department instrument” then choose “Master Copy for Bio REU sites su’10.”
4. On the next page, click “Reuse/adapt this instrument for a new survey” [You are warned not to edit this version. You’ll get a chance to edit your own copy in the next step.]
5. Now customize the survey: You can delete any or all of the optional questions #11-18. To add questions to the base survey, go to “Edit the questions” (#4) and then to the bottom of the survey. You can add individual items (in the same format) to an existing question block (this is the easiest) or add new question blocks (with response scales chosen from a menu). Please do NOT move or delete any of the core questions (original #1-10 and #19-31), so that we can gather a complete data set and so that students’ experience of the survey is as uniform as possible. Question numbers will change when you delete or move items, so refer to the original PDF file if you get mixed up. Press “Save & done” when you are finished.
6. To label your survey for your later reference (and ours, in ensuring that we have compiled all the data), fill in the “course name and description” (#1).
7. If you want to be able to check on who has completed the survey or not, enter student e-mail addresses in the “student list” box (#2). This does not tell you *what* they answered, just *whether* they have answered.
8. Set start and end dates (#5). This sets the time window in which students must reply. Warning: once you have opened the survey, you cannot edit it further. So set the end date to allow time to remind students or catch up with stragglers. You cannot reopen the survey once it is closed.
9. Announce the survey to your students (#6). This lets you choose a message from among several options and calls up your e-mail application so that you can edit the survey announcement and send it to your students. You will need to adjust the classroom-oriented language in the draft email, but be sure to preserve the URL and other instructions to students.
10. Log out. Now sit back and relax while the students complete the survey. The response rate will be highest if you provide a structured opportunity for them to respond– perhaps a visit to the computer lab with snacks to follow. We suggest you administer the survey near the end of the students’ research experience, but it need not be the last day.
11. After the close date, log into www.salgsite.org again and choose your final instrument from the list (you may also see various drafts in the list, if you experimented. Delete these at your convenience.) Click on the instrument number to open the Control Panel; choose “Analyze or download results” to see the statistical analyses that the salgsite provides or download a copy of the data (in comma-delimited form that can be imported into Excel and other programs) to conduct your own analyses.
12. At the end of the summer, we will contact you with instructions about how to share your data.

Thank you very much for participating in this pilot evaluation study! The more sites and students that participate, the more powerful and useful the results will be. We will check in with you at the end of the summer to gather any comments or feedback that you may wish to share.

Need help?

For more information about URSSA, visit <http://www.colorado.edu/eer/research/undergradfaqs.html>

For questions about this pilot study and your involvement as a Biology REU site, contact Janet Branchaw (branchaw@wisc.edu) or Julio Soto (jsoto3@email.sjsu.edu).

For technical questions or difficulties with the URSSA site, contact Tim Weston, westont@colorado.edu