

University of Portland Award for Outstanding Graduating Senior in Undergraduate Research

The Office of the Provost in conjunction with the Office of Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement offers an Outstanding Graduating Senior in Undergraduate Research Award annually to a graduating senior who has demonstrated achievement in collaborating with a faculty mentor in research or creative activities. This award is presented at the annual Founders' Day Awards Breakfast.

Evaluation Criteria

Strong candidates demonstrate excellence in a number of ways: effort, work ethic, enthusiasm as a budding researcher, adaptability, understanding of responsible conduct in research, contributions and dedication to their research team, and potential as future scholar.

Eligibility, Nomination and Review Process

The award is open to all graduating seniors. Candidates may be nominated by a UP professor or may self-nominate. The Undergraduate Research Advisory Board reviews the nominations and determines the award winner, with the approval of the Provost.

Timeline:

- Nominations due to ur@up.edu – December 15
- Candidate Materials due – Second Friday of Spring Semester
- Review of Candidate Materials by Undergraduate Research Advisory Board and recipient selected – early February
- Recipient confirmed by the Provost – late February
- Award recipient announced – Founders' Day Awards Breakfast

Candidate Submissions

In support of their case the nominee must submit to the committee:

1. A curriculum vitae.
2. A narrative statement, not to exceed 2 double spaced pages, that addresses how the student's undergraduate research experience(s) aided them in discerning their future path.
3. A confidential letter of recommendation from a faculty mentor that addresses the above criteria. The letter should be emailed directly to ur@up.edu by the faculty mentor.

Best Practices in Letter Writing

Specific considerations for University of Portland's Outstanding Graduating Senior in Undergraduate Research Award:

The evaluation criteria for this award are: effort, work ethic, enthusiasm as a budding researcher, adaptability, understanding of responsible conduct in research, contributions and dedication to their research team, and potential as future scholar.

A few general observations about the most effective letters:

- A letter of only a paragraph or two can indicate that the writer either does not know the student well or is able to say few positive things about the student. If your letter is that brief, then consider adding more details (see below). If after adding details, the letter is still very brief, it might be in the student's best interest for you to withdraw as a recommender. Please let the student know as soon as possible if you plan to withdraw as a recommender.
- On the other hand, letters that stretch over three pages may not be fully read by the evaluators. Shorter paragraphs are better so it is easier for the reader to understand your point in each and thus the overall import of the letter.
- If possible, an effective letter places the student in the context of a peer group. This can include students in a specific class, all recent mentees, or all of the students you have worked with over the course of your career. A concrete statement about how the current student stacks up against others provides the evaluators with a measuring device to understand the nature of your comments.
- Be specific and detailed. Instead of saying that student X was the best in this cohort of student researchers, explain what made this student the best. What was the nature of the project the student pursued that you found so impressive? What was a memorable moment in your research team when you realized that this student works at a different level than his/her colleagues? Using a narrative example is an effective way to communicate this information.