

Protecting Undergraduate Research at GVSU

Executive Summary

OURS and Undergraduate Research

The Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (OURS) is the university-wide service unit that provides support for students and faculty to pursue research and creative practice in their discipline

OURS is under threat

As Academic Affairs is redesigned, the University must preserve the programs, structures, systems, and supports that make high-quality, accessible undergraduate research possible.

Why undergraduate research matters

- **A defining GVSU strength.** Close faculty–student mentoring and meaningful research opportunities help distinguish GVSU from peer institutions and support student recruitment and retention. OURS is the only centralized undergraduate research program in the state of Michigan and has been recognized for its well-developed ecosystem of support for undergraduate research.
- **High-impact experiential learning.** Research and creative activity provide opportunities for students to apply classroom learning, conduct fieldwork or laboratory work, and produce creative work while developing career-ready and transferable skills.
- **Equitable participation.** Research opportunities should not be limited to students who already excel academically or can afford unpaid work. Paid opportunities and strong mentoring help broaden access and advance student-success and equity goals.

What must be protected?

- **OURS and its programs.** Protect OURS staff with expertise in research administration, undergraduate student development, faculty engagement, program management, and assessment. Protect the programs, structures, systems, and supports it provides across the entire university.
- **Quality mentoring and creative activity.** Preserve the quality, breadth, and depth of mentored undergraduate research through programs offered by OURS.
- **Funding and key staffing.** Protect existing institutional funding for OURS, including the key associate director position.
- **Students' ability to participate.** Many GVSU students must support themselves financially and cannot feasibly devote time to research unless opportunities are paid.

Concerns Raised About the Current Restructuring

- **Expanded responsibilities without added resources.** CSRSE took on graduate research support without corresponding increases in staffing, funding, or infrastructure.
- **Limited capacity.** CSRSE's budget has remained unchanged since 2010, and a 2019 reduction has not been restored. The unit has three Academic Professional staff and one Professional Support Staff member; an AP position overseeing OURS has been on hold for a second year.
- **Risks to existing student opportunities.** Programs and services potentially affected include the Undergraduate Research Assistant Program, Academic Conference Funds (already reduced by \$30,000), faculty-supported research pathways, and advising for undergraduate researchers.
- **A challenge for both undergraduate and graduate research.** Without a sustainable structure and resources aligned with responsibilities, the current arrangement creates trade-offs and risks weakening both areas as research and graduate education expand.

What the URC asks of university leadership

- **Protect OURS.** Make the office and its core programs, staffing, and institutional funding explicit priorities in the Academic Affairs redesign.
- **Match resources to responsibilities.** Provide the staffing, funding, and infrastructure needed to support the expanded scope of student research.
- **Resource the restructuring.** Establish a sustainable organizational and leadership structure that supports undergraduate and graduate research without sacrificing undergraduate opportunities.

GVSU can and should strengthen undergraduate student research at all levels. Protecting OURS and investing in the people, programs, and paid opportunities that sustain high-quality undergraduate research should be the keystone of this effort.

See the full position statement below

Protecting Undergraduate Research at GVSU

October 20, 2026

Undergraduate research is a distinctive strength of Grand Valley State University (GVSU) and a critical component of its undergraduate-focused mission. As the University redesigns Academic Affairs, the Undergraduate Research Council (URC) is concerned that expanding responsibilities without corresponding investments in staffing, funding, and infrastructure could weaken GVSU's longstanding commitment to faculty-mentored undergraduate research and scholarship.

GVSU's *Reach Higher Together* strategic plan reinforces the importance of protecting and strengthening undergraduate research. Commitment 3 states: "We will cultivate research, scholarship, and creative activity to advance knowledge and innovation that promote sustainability, fuel economic vitality, and serve the public good."

Fulfilling these commitments requires investment in the people, programs, and infrastructure that make research and community engagement possible. The URC urges the Academic Affairs Future Design Task Force and the Provost's Office to make protecting undergraduate research an explicit principle guiding the redesign.

The URC identifies four priorities that should guide the redesign:

- **Preserve GVSU's distinctive undergraduate research experience.** Protect high-quality, faculty-mentored research and creative activity that support student learning, recruitment, retention, and preparation for careers and graduate education.
- **Protect the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship (OURS).** Maintain the expertise, staffing, programs, and institutional funding that make undergraduate research possible across the University, including the key assistant director position.
- **Ensure equitable student access.** Preserve paid research opportunities and the support students need to participate regardless of their financial circumstances.
- **Align resources with responsibilities.** Provide the Center for Student Research and Scholarly Engagement (CSRSE) with the staffing, funding, and infrastructure needed to support undergraduate and graduate research and advance GVSU's strategic commitments.

A distinctive GVSU strength

As the URC noted in its [memo responding to the Strategic Plan to Augment Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity \(SPARCA\)](#), one of GVSU's key competitive advantages is the opportunity for students to work closely with faculty and develop meaningful mentoring relationships. These experiences help distinguish GVSU from peer institutions and contribute to student recruitment and retention.

OURS provides the expertise, programs, structures, systems, and support that make these opportunities available across the University. A redesign that prioritizes growth in enrollment or research volume without adequate support risks compromising the quality of individualized mentoring that makes GVSU distinctive.

A high-impact educational experience

Undergraduate research is a powerful form of experiential learning, enabling students to apply classroom knowledge through laboratory experiments, fieldwork, data collection, and creative activity. The [American Association of Colleges and Universities](#) identifies undergraduate research as a high-impact educational practice, and the [Council on Undergraduate Research](#) highlights the career-ready and transferable skills these experiences develop.

By supporting students as they generate and apply knowledge, undergraduate research advances GVSU's *Reach Higher Together* commitment to Impact-Driven Discovery. It also prepares students for professional careers, graduate education, and lifelong learning.

Equitable access to research

Undergraduate research opportunities should be accessible to students regardless of their financial circumstances or prior academic advantages. Many GVSU students must support themselves financially and cannot feasibly devote time to research without compensation. Protecting paid research opportunities and strong mentoring is essential to broadening participation and ensuring that more students benefit from these experiences.

CSRSE needs resources commensurate with its responsibilities

On March 23, 2026, the Provost announced a restructuring that moved graduate student research support into the then-named Center for Undergraduate Scholarly Engagement (CUSE), without additional staffing or funding. In April 2026, the URC raised concerns about the restructuring and the risks of expanding responsibilities without corresponding resources. In June 2026, the center was renamed the Center for Student Research and Scholarly Engagement (CSRSE), reflecting its expanded scope.

CUSE was already operating under significant resource constraints. CSRSE now oversees OURS, Fellowship, and Graduate Research. Despite substantial programmatic growth, its budget has remained unchanged since 2010, and a budget reduction implemented in 2019 has not been restored. Before the restructuring, CUSE was responsible for undergraduate scholar development, program administration, donor engagement, university-wide collaborations, fellowships, Student Scholars Day, the Undergraduate Research Assistant Program, research-intensive courses, and other initiatives. Since the restructuring announcement, there has been no increase in budget; the director of CSRSE's salary and job description have remained the same even with the significant workload increase, and one of the AP staff positions that oversees OURS has been put on hold for a second year in a row.

The restructuring expanded CSRSE's responsibilities to include graduate research without a corresponding increase in funding, staffing, or infrastructure. This creates a structural imbalance that will require trade-offs between undergraduate and graduate priorities. Operationally, this arrangement is unsustainable; strategically, it is weakening both areas. These concerns are especially pressing given the growth of undergraduate research, the expansion of graduate programs, the anticipated PhD program, and institutional strategies that emphasize expanding research opportunities.

Expanding graduate education without investing in the infrastructure needed to support it sends a conflicting message about GVSU's institutional priorities. It also raises serious concerns about the potential erosion of existing undergraduate research programs and services, such as the [Undergraduate Research Assistant Program](#), [Academic Conference Funds](#) (which has already been reduced by \$30,000), faculty-supported research pathways, and advising capacity for undergraduate researchers. These programs are integral to the student's experience and should not be placed at risk by a restructuring that adds responsibilities without additional resources.

CSRSE now oversees OURS, Fellowship, and Graduate Research. Yet its budget has remained unchanged since 2010, and a budget reduction implemented in 2019 has not been restored. CSRSE has three Academic Professional (AP) staff and one Professional Support Staff (PSS) member supporting research engagement across disciplines, colleges, and class standings. An AP position overseeing OURS has been on hold for a second consecutive year. The restructuring has not brought a corresponding increase in budget, staffing, or infrastructure.

These resource constraints are particularly concerning as undergraduate research grows, graduate programs expand, and GVSU considers an anticipated PhD program. Adding responsibilities without additional capacity creates pressure to divide limited resources between undergraduate and graduate priorities, potentially weakening both.

Existing undergraduate programs and services could be affected, including the [Undergraduate Research Assistant Program](#), [Academic Conference Funds](#) (which have already been reduced by \$30,000), faculty-supported research pathways, and advising for undergraduate researchers. These programs are integral to the student experience and should not be placed at risk by organizational changes that increase responsibilities without providing the resources needed to fulfill them.

The implications extend beyond individual programs. GVSU's ability to advance research, strengthen community partnerships, and fulfill its *Reach Higher Together* commitments depends on sustainable institutional capacity. CSRSE is central to that capacity. Expecting the center to support expanded research activity without corresponding investment risks creating a gap between the University's strategic ambitions and its ability to achieve them.

The URC's requests

The URC urges the Academic Affairs Future Design Task Force and the Provost's Office to:

1. **Make the protection of undergraduate research an explicit principle of the Academic Affairs redesign**, preserving GVSU's distinctive commitment to high-quality, faculty-mentored undergraduate research and creative activity.
2. **Protect OURS, including its existing institutional funding, expertise staffing, key assistant director position, and core programs.**
3. **Align CSRSE's resources with its expanded responsibilities** by providing the staffing, funding, and infrastructure necessary to support undergraduate research, fellowships, and graduate research sustainably.
4. **Preserve equitable access to research**, including paid opportunities that allow students with financial need to participate.
5. **Consult the URC before finalizing recommendations** that affect undergraduate research, its programs, or its institutional support.

GVSU has the expertise, institutional knowledge, and capacity to support student research at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Realizing this potential requires a sustainable organizational structure and resources commensurate with the scope of the work.

Protecting undergraduate research is not simply about preserving existing programs. It is an investment in GVSU's students, institutional identity, recruitment and retention, and research capacity.

Sincerely,

The Undergraduate Research Council
The Kindschi Research Fellowship Committee

Please reach out to Dr. Kristin Hedges with any questions (Chair, Undergraduate Research Council, hedgeskr@gvsu.edu)