



# A Posit on Paper: Recognizing Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, & Creative Inquiry as a Career-Readiness Tool

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In the midst of the current cultural narrative diminishing the value of higher education, a prolonged pandemic that has exacerbated inequities in so many ways, an increasing focus on workforce development, legislative mandates, and changing student populations, the importance of bridging the impact of URSCI experiences to career readiness skills is a critical next step for the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) as

research, scholarship and creative inquiry (URSCI) has been well-established in the literature as a high-impact practice that helps all of our student populations advance. However, to fully realize the transformative impact of URSCI, as faculty, mentors and higher

education administrators, we are called to extend our definition of student success, learn how the valuable skills, knowledge and dispositions that our students gain and hone through participating in URSCI experiences relate to desirable career competencies, and help our students learn and articulate how their URSCI experiences help prepare them for their next steps. In 2021 our partners at National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) updated their list of career readiness competencies that our students need to enter and thrive in today's work environment. These competencies easily map

to these competencies, make a visible and transparent this crosswalk, and help our students frame their URSCI stories in ways that potential employers will understand and value.

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To build this bridge, I share the NACE career readiness competencies and illustrate how mentors can infuse the associated sample behaviors within their undergraduate research, scholarship and creative inquiry projects in visible, transparent, and consumable ways for our students to recognize the relevancy, value and leave with the language and ability to tell their URSCI stories.

<b>Eight NACE Competencies</b>	
Career & Self-Development	P2
Communication	P2
Critical Thinking	P2
Equity & Inclusion	P2
Leadership	P3
Professionalism	P3
Teamwork	P3
Technology	P3

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### Career & Self-Development

NACE defines the Career & Self-Development competency as the ability to "[p]roactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's

opportunities for members of historically marginalized communities," mentors need to develop these competencies. The resources are available. Employers and our communities are calling for these skills in our students. It is upon us as URSCI mentors to develop these competencies in ourselves.

### Leadership

**For NACE, leadership is the ability to “recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.”**

of URSCI in terms of leadership skills. However, if we consider the NACE sample behaviors, we can see leadership demonstrated in several including: “seek out and leverage diverse resources and feedback from others to inform direction,” “use innovative thinking to go beyond traditional methods,” “plan, initiate, manage, complete, and evaluate projects,” and “use innovative thinking to go beyond

graduate students and post-docs), our students are presented with the opportunity to “serve as a role model to others by approaching

to “inspire, persuade, and motivate self and others under a shared

with an additional platform to demonstrate leadership competencies. Surfacing for students the leadership skills they are developing and intentionally structuring opportunities for students to describe their

presentations, cover letters and interviews will help students tease out

### Professionalism

**Professionalism is “knowing work environment differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.”**

Elements of the professional competency consistently appear in the URSCI literature as positive outcomes. Indeed, most of the sample behaviors are embedded in the expectations and likely in our URSCI project documents. These include: “act equitably with integrity and accountability to self, others, and the organization,” “be present and prepared,” “demonstrate dependability (e.g., report consistently for work or meetings),” “prioritize and complete tasks to accomplish organizational goals,” “consistently meet or exceed goals and expectations,” “have an attention to detail, resulting in few if any errors in their work,” and “show a high level of dedication toward doing a good job.” Mapping these behaviors to student expectations for the project and the professionalism competency, can help students make these important connections. Surfacing the practice of these behaviors in student interactions with various stakeholders including mentors, teammates, community or industry partners, clients, and audiences can further help make these connections. One sample behavior less likely to be embedded in URSCI is to “maintain a positive personal brand in alignment with organization and personal career values.” However, faculty can help to highlight the importance of a positive personal brand and infuse exercises for students to recognize and practice this

behavior in career preparation materials (cover letters, interview preparation, resume, elevator pitch, etc.) and social media presence

assist here as well, by developing their own professional social media presence as a model and opportunity to help validate student skills and advance their network.

### Teamwork

**NACE defines teamwork as the ability to “build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.”**

The URSCI literature consistently includes teamwork competencies as positive outcomes from participating in URSCI experiences. Relationships are at the core

of the URSCI experience. Consider the following familiar sample behaviors:

“listen carefully to others, taking time to understand and ask appropriate questions without interrupting,” “be

accountable for individual and team responsibilities and deliverables,” “employ personal strengths, knowledge, and talents to complement those of others,” “exercise the ability to compromise and be agile,”

“collaborate with others to achieve common goals,” and “build strong, positive working relationships with supervisor and team.” URSCI mentors can forefront these example behaviors by naming them, infusing in project expectations, rubrics, and intentionally building in

across various URSCI models. Faculty can also help to build

related to the project.

### Technology

**For NACE, developing a competency in technology means the ability to “understand and leverage technologies ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.”**

This competency surfaces in the URSCI literature in discipline areas, and data

the sample behaviors are embedded in the URSCI process itself: “navigate change and be open to learning new technologies,” “use

“manage technology to integrate information to support relevant, effective, and timely decision-making,” “quickly adapt to new or unfamiliar technologies, and “manipulate information, construct ideas, and use technology to achieve strategic goals. URSCI mentors can help our students to articulate this skill by calling out

**The more URSCI mentors are comfortable with career readiness competencies, the better equipped we will be to surface these competencies, create practice opportunities, and help launch our students into thriving careers.**

the technologies used. Further, at this time when we have leveraged technologies in novel ways to continue our URSCI projects during the pandemic, consider how we found paths to communicate, collaborate, conference, document, and discuss our work. These are skills that will carry to the evolving workplace environment. Name these skills for our students and create opportunities for them to discuss the techniques used to gather, synthesize and analyze information informally, formally, and in written and verbal formats.

In short, mentors are well-poised to close the articulation gap between what students are learning in their URSCI experience, what recruiters are looking for in early career talent acquisition—and increasingly what legislators, students, and parents are seeking higher education to demonstrate as gains from an undergraduate degree. A minor reframing of how we think about presenting our URSCI experiences to our students can have powerful impacts on helping them to think about the transferable career readiness skills they are developing and honing through their URSCI experience. Surfacing, naming, and

well as creating multiple opportunities for students to practice these skills can have broad impacts in our students' success in the various paths they choose. Student-centered career readiness adjustments can range from simply mapping and annotating syllabi and project assignments, exercises and documents to career

preparation materials and exercises (resumes, cover letters, interview preparation, elevator

See for example

Brownell, Jayne E., and Lynn E. Swaner. 2010. *Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality*. Colleges and Universities.

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Kuh, George D. 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who has Access to Them, and How to Promote Their Use*. Research on Learning in Education.