OFFICE OF
STUDENT RESEARCH
Illinois State University

The FIREbird Grant Program for Undergraduate Faculty-mentored Independent Research Experiences

Purpose

The objective of the FIREbird program is to support undergraduate students to pursue independent, faculty-mentored research. *Applications for the FIREbird Program must be written by student* researchers with input and collaboration from faculty mentors.

OSR aims to fund diverse students from a variety of disciplines across campus to reflect the richness of research, scholarly creativity, and innovation at Illinois State University. Students from all disciplines are invited to apply.

Eligibility

Students must be undergraduate students in good standing at Illinois State University during the time of their research grant. Groups of students working with faculty mentor(s) on the same research project may apply collectively for **one** research grant. Priority for funding will be given to students/faculty mentors who have not previously received OSR research support.

Students must have at least one faculty mentor who must be a tenured/tenure track professor at Illinois State. Faculty mentors agree to assist the student with the research project and must submit a letter of support that briefly outlines their mentorship plan.

Amount of Funding and Allowable Expenses

The FIREbird Program provides up to $3000 (summer); $1500 (Fall or Spring semester.) Funding may be used for:
- Student researcher employment (at the rate of $16/hour),
- Reimbursement of supplies that directly support the student's research project,
- Travel essential to conduct or complete an independent research project, or,
- Equipment needed to conduct research, but note that:

    o All durable equipment or software purchased with OSR funds is University Property and must be returned to the University at the end of the grant program.

    o All requests for equipment/software must be accompanied a section in the Faculty Mentor's Letter of Support that confirms that the:

- equipment/software is not already available on campus,
- provides a rationale for the purchase, and
- plans for future use of the software/equipment. *See the notes in the Budget Template and Justification below.*

  o Once equipment is purchased it must be tagged as university property and the student must fill out a loan agreement.

FIREbird funds may not be used for:
- Faculty mentors' salary, expenses, travel, or supplies,
- Expenses covered by another grant program (e.g. a FEEDER grant, faculty grant),
- Costs associated with traditional class projects, class assignments, or any activities that are associated with a traditional campus "in the classroom" course,
- Supplemental funding for study abroad trips, student teaching, training, or internships.
- Travel to present research/ participate in juried exhibits (See Pinion Grant Program).

Students who can be funded with faculty grant funds should **not** apply for the FIREbird Program. Unused funds over $100 must be returned to OSR.

Deadlines

See Office of Student Research website for deadlines.

Application Requirements

Please read these instructions carefully. Proposals that do not follow the guidelines will not be considered.

Students will submit:
I. **A completed application** form in https://ilstu.infoready4.com/#
II. **A Proposal** of 1500 words or less, inclusive of references. It must include
   A. Student Name/Email/Major
   B. Faculty Mentor Name/Email/Department or School
   C. Project Title
   D. Project Description.
      The project may conform to disciplinary standards but must be free of technical jargon and written for a general audience. It must answer the following questions:
   1. What is the goal of the project (background, objectives)?
   2. What is the research question or hypothesis?
   3. What methods will be used to investigate this issue?
   4. What are the anticipated outcomes of the project?

5. What is the significance of the project?
6. What is the schedule for the project and use of funds (they should be used within the term, although extensions may be approved)?

III. **A Personal Statement** (300 words maximum). In this brief essay, the student should describe any previous independent research projects, and why this proposed research project is important to them. They should also describe other commitments they have (such as RSO leadership positions, or other employment) and how they plan to balance this research experience with those other commitments.

IV. **Budget and Justification Form**. Students must use the budget form to provide an itemized list of all anticipated purchases. (*See Budget Template below.*)

Budget and Justification Forms

Budget Forms in both Excel and Word formats are provided on the InfoReady competition site. Students **MUST** submit a budget using one of the budget forms. See image below.

Instructions for completing the form:

Fill in the orange/peach-colored sections and upload the budget along with their proposal.

Student Name:

Student Employment: Calculate total number of hours expected to be spent on research. Multiply times $16. Funds for student employment will be transferred from OSR to the faculty mentor's unit. Departments/schools are responsible for hiring student employees.

Medicare benefits Calculation: All student employees will have Medicare taxes deducted from their FIREbird salaries at a rate of 1.45%. Summer grantees may have additional Social Security benefits withheld for a total rate of 7.45%. This cost will be charged to the grant and must be calculated in the proposed budget (the Excel worksheet does this for you; the Word file tells you how).

Supplies and Equipment: List the total amount requested. You may attach a detailed list or add it in the Notes section of the budget form, if needed.

Travel: Provide the total amount requested. You may attach a detailed discussion or add it in the Notes section of the budget form, if needed.

Research Incentives: Students may request funds for research incentives (i.e. gift cards for research participants). Illinois State uses the online platform TruCentive to deliver electronic gift cards. Funds for incentives will not be released until the student has obtained an approved Institutional Review Board protocol number and submitted a request For incentives via Illinois State's [Research Incentive's webpage:.](#) The TruCentive form must be submitted to Barb Rexroat at bjrexro@ilstu.edu.

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Fall and Spring FIREbird Budget Template/ FY26

Instructions: Fill out sections in orange by typing directly into the table.			
STUDENT NAME:			
	Item/Description	**Amt Requested**	**Notes/Justification**
Student Employment	#Hours @ 16/Hr.	a) $	Research assignment at $16/hr.
Benefits Cost Calculation *	Multiply amt requested above in a) by .0145; Include the answer on this line.	b) $	*Medicare is charged to your account at 1.45% of the student's wages.
Total requested for student employment	Add a) and b)	c) $	
Supplies/Equipment		d) $	Provide total amount. Add detailed list under Notes, if applicable.
Travel**		e) $	Provide total amount. Add detailed list under Notes, if applicable.
Research Incentives (Gift Cards)***		f) $	
Total Requested	Add items c) through f)	$	Semester Grant Max $1500
NOTES:			

* *Student employees will have Medicare taxes deducted from their FIREbird salaries at a rate of 1.45%. Your account is charged 1.45% of the student's wages for the employer portion of Medicare taxes. See Payroll for more information.

**See University Travel guidelines. Mileage rates may change. The rate is $.70 /mile as of 1/1/25

***Students who are awarded funds for research incentives (i.e. gift cards for research participants) will need to provide an approved Institutional Review Board protocol number and follow instructions found on Illinois State's Research Incentive's webpage. The TruCentive form must be submitted to Barb Rexroat at bjrexro@ilstu.edu before incentives can be issued.

Letter of Support

Once the student submits a proposal, an automated request for a Letter of Support will be sent to their faculty mentor. The Letter of Support must include a Mentorship Plan which answers the following questions:

1) How many hours do you anticipate the student will be involved with the project? (e.g. hours per week for x weeks?)
2) How will you be meeting with the student? (online, in-person, in lab, in field)
3) What specific skills/understanding can the student researcher(s) expect to gain

from this project?

4) What training will you provide the student researcher(s) (e.g. specific skills, process) throughout the research process?

5) What are the expected outcomes of the project for the student? (eg. conference presentations, publications? Preparation for future phase research?

Faculty mentors must also affirm that the proposed student research project cannot be supported under a faculty research grant.

If equipment or software is requested, the faculty mentor must include the following in their letter of support:

1) Confirmation that the requested equipment and software is not already available via The Help Center Service Catalog, Milner Library's Technology Loan Service, the Graduate School, The Digital Innovation, Graphics, and Gaming Studio (DIGGS), or other campus office.

2) Purchase justification and plan for long-term use of the equipment/software:
   i. Why should this equipment/software be purchased?
   ii. Would other students find it useful? And if so, where would the equipment/software be most accessible to those students?
   iii. Who will be responsible for maintenance/updates?
   iv. Who will be responsible for managing borrowing/use privileges?

Evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following questions:
1. Does the project have a clearly formulated scholarly question or research hypothesis?
2. Is the project described adequately in terms of what the student will be doing and how?
3. Are the anticipated outcomes of the project adequately described?
4. Is the project well-written and does it follow the application guidelines?
5. Does the budget align with project's goals?
6. Does the mentor's letter of support indicate adequate mentorship for project and student success?

Post-Award Requirements

FIREbird students are expected to:
- Present the results of their research during University Research Symposium or other venue appropriate to the project,
- Participate in OSR programming, as their schedule allows, and,
- Participate in online research and professional skills development sessions with other awardees (approximately 6 hours total over the course of the summer/semester)

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Faculty mentors will be asked to submit:
- Provide a report of expenditures and unused funds,
- Provide citations for student outcomes including manuscripts, presentations, and publications,
- Include scholarly outcomes resulting from the project in their annual productivity report (Faculty Success) and tagged them as including undergraduate students. These accounting measures are necessary to help OSR track the impact of the program outcomes.

Faculty will receive a link to the report for in December, May or Aug following their students' award. Submission of the report is required to maintain eligibility for this, and other programs sponsored by OSR.