

2026 Department of Biological Sciences Undergraduate Research Awards

The Department of Biological Sciences will offer up to three competitive financial awards of \$1000 to support undergraduate research projects during this calendar year. These awards include the Stacey Smith Biology Research Excellence Award, the Biology Alumni Undergraduate Research Award, and the Robert Jones Undergraduate Research Excellence Award. The following procedures and policies apply to all awards, with additional requirements for the Stacey Smith award detailed on the next page. Support will be given for one academic semester. Funds are designated for direct support of research and can be used to pay for equipment, supplies, fieldwork, and the use of specialized research services, such as automated DNA sequencing or the use of a confocal microscope. The Alumni and Jones Awards may also be used for travel to conferences directly related to the proposed research project.

Qualifications: Eligible students include undergraduates majoring in the Department of Biological Sciences or undergraduates from other Virginia Tech departments working with a Department of Biological Sciences Faculty member. Applicants should have an in-major QCA of 3.0, or greater. Awards are offered to support research conducted during the spring, summer, or fall semesters of 2026. Note that eligibility for the Stacey Smith award is limited to members of groups underrepresented in the sciences (see next page). The student must be supervised by a faculty member in the Department of Biological Sciences or in another academic unit at Virginia Tech while conducting this research. Students are encouraged but not required to enroll for undergraduate research credit while conducting the sponsored research. To apply for these awards, the student must have completed at least one previous semester of research experience. This experience could include volunteer, paid, or for credit work. Students should include a one or two sentence description of the previous work as part of the proposal.

Deadline: The deadline for submitting proposals for research to be conducted during the 2026 calendar year is March 16, 2026.

Applications: Applications consist of the following three items: a completed official cover sheet, a concise abstract of the proposed work *authored by the applicant*, and a letter of support from the sponsoring faculty member. The abstract is limited to one typed page, single-spaced, with 11-point text, and one-inch margins. It should contain the following elements: 1. A brief introduction and justification for the project. 2. A description of the approach to solving the problem with an outline of how the project will be completed within the semester. 3. A short description of the applicant's previous research experience and, if applicable, how that experience may qualify the applicant to complete the current proposal. Inclusion of references or budgets is not necessary. Figures may be included but must fit into the one-page proposal summary. The cover sheet and abstract should be submitted together in PDF format. The sponsoring letter should be submitted separately by the faculty advisor. All application materials should be sent to Tad Seyler (tad@vt.edu).

Review Process: The Undergraduate Research Awards Committee will act as the review panel for these awards. The committee may seek input from other university faculty members and may schedule interviews with students who submit proposals. A review summary will not be provided to students who submit proposals. Awardees will be notified by April 3, 2026.

Expectations of Students Who Receive Research Awards: Awardees are expected to complete the research project described in the proposal and to submit a one-page summary of the project results to the undergraduate research committee within one calendar month of the last day of classes for the semester of the award. Sponsored students must prepare a poster or other presentation to be delivered at a suitable venue. Such venues include university events, research fairs, the department's Research Day, local, regional, or national scientific meetings, or an honors thesis defense. Seniors without an opportunity to present their work otherwise may arrange to present their work directly to the undergraduate research committee. All documents related to the project must be submitted before the last day of classes of the next semester. Additionally, awardees are expected to send a letter of thanks to the sponsor. Requirements specific to the Stacey Smith Award (see next page) must also be satisfied by those awardees.

The Department of Biological Sciences Stacey Smith Biology Research Excellence Award

This award was established by Stacey Smith, Ph.D. to recognize undergraduate students who excel in basic biological research and provide funding for associated expenses. The intent of this \$1000 award is to support students interested in a career in basic research and currently engaged in research within the Department of Biological Sciences. To be considered for this award, students must apply through the undergraduate research committee and indicate on the application cover sheet that they are eligible for the award and agree to its stipulations. Eligibility is limited to students meeting the following criteria:

- Must be from a population that is underrepresented in scientific research (*e.g.*, underrepresented genders, or underrepresented minorities as defined by the university [<https://udc.vt.edu/irdata/dictionary>], or first-generation college students).
- Must be currently enrolled as a freshman, sophomore, junior, or first semester senior.

Use of these funds is restricted in the following ways:

- Funds must be spent exclusively on laboratory supplies or research-related expenses for the student's project.
- Funds are not to be used for tuition, books, or travel.

The awardee is expected to present the work at a scientific symposium or poster session.

Selection will be based, in part, on a written recommendation from a faculty advisor stating that the student has demonstrated excellence, or potential for excellence, in undergraduate research and deserves the recognition and financial support. The statement from the faculty advisor may take the form of a short paragraph or a longer letter if one is already prepared.