ACUR

Australasian Council for Undergraduate Research

hosts of the Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research

CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

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1   ABOUT ACUR CONFERENCES

The Australasian Council for Undergraduate Research Inc (ACUR) works to ensure that a high quality international conference of undergraduate research is held in Australasia annually. It aims to support different institutions in hosting the conference and to gain support for the conference in the wider higher and tertiary education community. The ACUR Executive, led by the ACUR Chair, has the responsibility to ensure consistency and quality of conferences. An International Steering Committee advises the Executive, disseminates information within institutions and encourages students' presentation and attendance. The ACUR Executive and the Steering Committee communicate through electronic means but may meet at conferences. Small task groups may be established from time to time to work on specific issues.

1.1 Definition of an ACUR conference

An undergraduate research conference is like any other academic conference, but presentations are delivered by Undergraduate, including Honours, students presenting work they have done either as part of their course or as part of an internship. As a multi-disciplinary conference, undergraduates have the opportunity to network with other undergraduate researchers from their own disciplines, and also to learn about how other disciplines approach research problems. An ACUR undergraduate research conference should have a celebratory atmosphere as it provides a great opportunity to meet students from other universities and share research experiences.

An ACUR Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research is designed to complement and not compete with undergraduate research provision at institutional and state-wide levels.

1.2 Criteria for an ACUR conference of undergraduate research

1. is open to all undergraduate students and recent graduates including Honours students (within 12 months of Graduation at Bachelor's level) to present research conducted during or before undergraduate studies including extra-curricular research;
2. is open to both individual and group submissions;
3. adopts an inclusive approach to undergraduate research which encourages participation from all disciplines, all levels of study and all types of higher and tertiary education institutions;
4. involves an academic peer review process for abstracts which allows students to resubmit where appropriate;
5. is normally a face to face conference, but may include virtual conference elements (e.g. electronic networking, webinars, Zoom/Teams discussions);
6. offers a range of options for students to disseminate research (for example, through posters, oral presentations, workshops, performances etc.);

7. is cost-effective to ensure that the conference fee for student delegates is affordable;
8. has a social program to give students the opportunity to mix and debate outside of the formal presentations;
9. involves undergraduate students in the running of the conference;
10. welcomes staff, including supervisors, institutional representatives and members of the ACUR Steering Committee as delegates, and includes a session or sessions for them to discuss the implementation and management of undergraduate research;
11. provides time and space for the ACUR Inc AGM.

1.3 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to help you in hosting an ACUR conference. It is based on experiences of ten years of ACUR conferences. The document provides advice and the location of resources for each stage of the process from applying to host a conference to finalising the conference organisation. Conference hosts should use it as a guide to expectations and procedures related ACUR documents and templates.

A number of documents and templates support the Conference process and are to be found on the ACUR website or are available on request from the ACUR Executive Officer, viz:

1. [ACUR Logo Guidelines](#) document
2. [Proposal to host an Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research](#) form
3. [Example of DVC letter to accompany an Expression of interest](#)
4. [Conference Management Timeline](#) (see 4.4)
5. [Student presenter abstract/paper submission](#) template
6. [Spreadsheet of Submissions Data](#) (see point 5.2(4) of "Finalising ACUR Conference organisation" below)
7. [Paper submission guidelines and coversheet](#)
8. Conference Registration Form template
9. Examples of 'Permission to use' (e.g. photos) documents (see 4.3)
10. [Judging Posters](#)
11. [Prize conditions](#)
12. [ACUR Conference Sponsorship](#) document.
13. [Feedback Response to Review form](#)

See also

    a. Suggested Outline of Conference program (see 4.1)
    b. Suggested Structure for Conference Report (see 5.2(3))

2   ACUR CONFERENCE HOSTS

2.1 Host Institutions

All ACUR Conferences are organised by a host institution with the support of ACUR committees and resources. The host institution is a university or other higher or tertiary education institute in Australia, New Zealand or nearby territories.

2.2 Past conference hosts

2012 – Macquarie University
2013 – Macquarie University
2014 – Australian National University
2015 – University of Western Australia
2016 – Central Queensland University
2017 – The Univer
sity of Adelaide
2018 – La Trobe University
2019 – The University of Newcastle
2021 – Australian National University (online)
2022 – The University of Sydney

2.3 Applying to host an ACUR Conference

In the first instance, potential hosts are advised to notify the ACUR Chair that they would like to submit an Expression of Interest. The Chair will suggest feasibility depending on other potential hosts that have been identified. A detailed proposal is then required specifying how their institution will meet the ACUR criteria (see page 1). This will include details of administrative support and the facilities available for the conference, an indicative budget, and a timeline. A template is available for this purpose at: https://www.acur.org.au/acur-conferences/

The following year's conference venue is normally announced at the last session of the previous year's conference and there is quite a lot to get through before then so we encourage institutions wishing to submit an expression of interest to do so as soon as they are able.

Conferences are underwritten by the host institution and ACUR does not subsidise it, nor does it make any claim on any profits arising from the conference; Student delegates become student members of ACUR through a $10 membership fee being included in their conference fee.

2.4 Application Process

The procedure is:

1.   The Institution submits to the ACUR Chair a draft Expression of Interest.

2. The Chair shares this with the Executive and the Steering Committee who provide feedback.
3. The host Institution revises their expression of interest in the light of the feedback.
4. The ACUR Executive normally agrees the revised expression of interest. But reserves the right in exceptional cases to refer the expression of interest back to the host institution.
5. The expression of interest is signed off by a senior institutional member (usually a DVC) who writes a letter specifying agreement that the host institution will take legal responsibility for all risk management issues associated with the conference, including insurance and security, IP issues/ creative commons etc.; and forwarded to the Chair or Executive Officer.
6. The ACUR Chair agrees, and the conference venue is publicly announced.
7. Our experience is that this process usually takes longer than expected as there is usually some negotiation needed at institutional level – particularly where matters of accommodation and finance are concerned.

3   ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Responsibilities of the host institution

The host institution will offer a conference that meets all of the ACUR Conference criteria, namely:

1. fully underwrite the conference and take full responsibility for the administration and financial management of the conference; budgetary administration and use of fees;
2. take legal responsibility for all risk management issues associated with the conference, including insurance and security, IP issues/ creative commons etc.;
3. create an internal Conference Organising Committee and take responsibility for the front-line management of the conference;
4. include an ACUR Executive Committee nominee on the organising committee, with the expectation that they will attend meetings at least monthly, in order to maintain a balanced partnership (see Executive responsibilities below).
5. Establishing and agreeing with the ACUR Executive a timetable for the management of conference organisation including marketing, website updating, and the registration process; a submissions, review and notification of outcome timetable.
6. take responsibility for managing the quality of the academic and social program and work presented at the conference.
7. conducting a submissions and review process according to the agreed timetable; with an opportunity for students to re-submit where appropriate. The ACUR submissions template (see section 1.4) should be used for submissions.
8. Providing an early-bird and normal registration process taking account of the time needed for students to obtain funding from their institutions;
9. set the fees to be charged to delegates in collaboration with the ACUR Executive and taking into account the requirement to return to ACUR $10 per student registrant (see point 11 below);
10. at the end of the conference, to return to ACUR Inc an amount equal to the total student membership fees for the number of students presenting at the conference (currently $10 per student);
11. retain any profits. Profits are calculated after the student membership fees (see 9 above) have been returned to ACUR;
12. meet any losses incurred;
13. disseminate the proceedings on the ACUR website (www.acur.org.au);
14. use the ACUR identity in accordance with the published ACUR Logo guidelines in all publicity including social media relating to the event;
15. keep the ACUR Executive updated about the progress of conference organisation by the Conference Chair attending meetings of the ACUR Executive.
16. encourage academics in the host institution to send students to present and participate;

17. identify and advertise on the ACUR website low-cost accommodation options including staying with local students including graduate students, and/or local colleges of residence, hotels etc.;
18. designating nominations for prizes and managing the presentation of prizes at the conclusion of the conference;
19. Invite hosts of the following year's conference to have a dialogue and a discussion, and give a brief invitation to delegates at the final conference session in order to stimulate excitement and ensure a sense of continuity.
20. give consideration to publication of the best papers in a local or other undergraduate research journal.
21. evaluate the conference and report to the ACUR Executive in a way that can be included on the ACUR website and in the ACUR Newsletter (URNA);
22. complete all finalisation requirements (see point 5 below within two months following the conference.

3.2 Responsibilities of the ACUR Steering Committee

The ACUR Steering Committee consists of individuals who have influence in their institutions in terms of gaining support and funding for undergraduates to attend and present at ACUR conferences, as well as individuals who are researching, implementing or leading projects to engage undergraduates in research and inquiry. The Steering Committee includes representatives from over 48 universities from Australia, New Zealand and worldwide. A large, inclusive, Steering Committee ensures information is spread widely across institutions and that no particular individual is burdened with work.

1. In regard to ACUR Conferences, the Steering Committee:
   a. Provides advice to the Executive regarding the ongoing reputation and progress of ACUR and its conferences.
   b. Provides comments on Hosting Proposals to provide feedback to hosts and suggestions for the Executive.
   c. Encourages the spread of undergraduate research in their institutions;
   d. Encourages institutions to host an ACUR conference;
   e. Assists in disseminating information about undergraduate research in general and ACUR in particular in their own institutions;
   f. Encourages participation in ACUR conferences.

3.3 Responsibilities of the ACUR Executive Committee

An Executive committee comprising the Chair, the Vice Chair, The Treasurer, the serving conference organiser, the New Zealand Representative, the Newsletter (URNA) Editor, and the Executive Officer acts for ACUR in all matters of policy and practice. In regard to ACUR conferences. On the advice of the Steering Committee the Executive:

1. Establishes, maintains and publicises criteria and guidelines for institutions wishing to host an undergraduate research conference.
2. Calls for expressions of interest from institutions to host future conferences and makes decisions on hosting proposals.
3. Decides on the hosts and venue for the annual ACUR conference.
4. Permits the conference to be branded as the official Australasian Conference of Undergraduate Research and provides details of ACUR's logo and branding to be used in conference communications including the website (www.acur.org.au) and social media platforms.
5. Undertakes to ensure a breadth of representation across the higher and tertiary education sector on the Steering Committee. ACUR has a sizeable database of institutions and individuals with an interest in, and/or connection to, undergraduate research including its members and past student presenters and their supervisors. This can be used by ACUR's Executive Officer to distribute pre-prepared marketing and advertising material on behalf of Conference hosts. For privacy reasons, the ACUR database itself cannot be provided to other institutions including conference hosts.
6. Appoints a member of the Executive, or Steering Committee to serve as a member of the Host institution Conference Organising Committee and monitors contact.
7. Provides practical help and guidance to conference organisers as requested such as documentation, spreadsheets, pro-formas, publicity etc.
8. Undertakes to lobby for sponsorship including funding for student attendance and assists host institutions in gaining sponsorship for conferences.
9. Responds to feedback from host institutions and revises documentation in the light of their experiences.

3.4 Responsibilities of designated ACUR Conference Committee member

1. Attend and contribute to meetings of the Conference Organising Committee.
2. Maintain regular contact with the Conference Committee Chair and the ACUR Chair.
3. Report regularly on ACUR Executive decisions and other ACUR activities in so far as it may influence conference organisation.
4. Report problems and challenges of the Conference Organising Committee to the Executive Committee.

3.5 Responsibilities of the ACUR Student Committee

The ACUR Student Committee is a sub-committee of the ACUR Executive. It provides a platform for student opinions and suggestions for events and conference activities, encourages and supports student activities relating to undergraduate research and promotes awareness of ACUR amongst students across Australasia. It also provides opportunities for proactive student members of the Student Committee to experience

committee work, become involved in conference organisation and have opportunities for CV building. In regards to ACUR conferences,

1. The Student Committee provides communication opportunities for students to meet on social media before and during the conference;
2. Assists with advertising the conference to students on social media
3. May assist with conference organisation as members of the Conference Organising Committee;
4. May organise social events during the conference;
5. May assist with abstract reviewing;
6. May assist with chairing conference sessions.

4 THE CONFERENCE

4.1 Conference Program

The conference program must include:

1. a range of options for students to disseminate research (for example, through posters, oral presentations, workshops, performances etc.);
2. opportunities for students to comment on their experiences during the conference, e.g. comment boards;
3. Social events e.g. a dinner for students to socialise and have fun; break out groups, speed networking, BBQs, dinners; (see 4.9)
4. a workshop, meeting or pre-conference session on undergraduate research by and for academic staff where appropriate;
5. scheduling time for the ACUR AGM in the program
6. Scheduling a prize-giving event at the end of the conference.

4.2 Use of ACUR identity

ACUR's reputation is dependent upon the quality and integrity of its conferences. It is therefore important that conference material and publicity respect its visual identity. All written communications must therefore conform to ACUR's Logo Guidelines as specified in the Logo Guidelines document. These guidelines specify how ACUR should be presented alongside other institutions such as host universities.

4.3 Permissions and acknowledgement of sources

At the conference registration process, permissions must be sought from all delegates for the public use, during and following the conference, for artefacts and ephemera used and collected during it. This includes photographs and video material taken and visual material used in presentations (e.g. powerpoint slides).

Student presenters must ensure that they own or have obtained copyright clearance for images and other materials in their presentations. Students must acknowledge that their presentation has not been presented elsewhere. Sources used must be referenced appropriately. ACUR cannot be held responsible for breaches of copyright by individual students and/or the conference hosts.

4.4 Suggested Timeline

A suggested timeline for managing the conference is available at
http://www.acur.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ACUR-Conference-Management.pdf

4.5 Abstract / paper submissions

It is normal to request abstracts be submitted for consideration for presentation. The host Conference Organising Committee is free to decide whether, in addition, to include the possibility of students presenting full papers.

Full papers may be solicited, and these may be used in deciding prize-winners. A sample coversheet and paper submission guidelines is included in the list of documents in section 1.4. Also in that section is a sample of Prize conditions designed to be agreed with prize donors. The Conference Organising Committee may wish to arrange for publication of a selection of full papers in an undergraduate research journal. Many such journals exist. In the past, ACUR papers have been published in *Reinvention*, *Macquarie Matrix*, and URNCST, or in an in-house journal of the hosting university.

4.6 Reviewing process

Criteria for the acceptance of abstracts/papers for presentation may be decided by the conference hosts. The following criteria for abstract submission have been used in past ACUR conferences:

1. A clear statement of the research question or field of investigation
2. A clear statement of the methodology used in the research
3. The background to the research project
4. A summary of conclusions (or preliminary conclusions)
5. The submission is written for a general multidisciplinary audience
6. Technical language is clearly explained or avoided.

Please note that criteria 5 and 6 are essential as ACUR conferences are multi-disciplinary events, not specialist/ disciplinary technical conferences. For this reason, ACUR recommends at least one expert review and one generalist review for each submission.

The Conference Organising Committee decides how to conduct the review process. However, ACUR suggests that the review process should follow the general academic blind review process. The expectation is that most submissions would be accepted. Some submissions may need re-wording to ensure comprehension. Rejections require sensitive handling and advice.

Following review, students must have the opportunity to amend their submission and re-submit at any stage or give reasons for not following suggested changes. When feedback is given, students should be encouraged to seek advice from their supervisor if they have one. However, students are responsible for their response to feedback and must rationally justify any non-compliance with reviewers' suggestions. Please note the Feedback Response to Review form (Section 1.3) which can be used to facilitate this.

Outsourcing the conference review process is discouraged as this can create a disconnect between the Conference Committee and ACUR policies.

4.7 Role of supervisors / mentors

Most students will have a supervisor, but not having a supervisor should not be a barrier to conference presentation acceptance. Supervisors and mentors are encouraged to have oversight of abstracts and support students to develop presentation skills. Following the conference, supervisors named on submission forms will be thanked by the ACUR Executive for their participation.

4.8 Conference Proceedings

The proceedings constitute the public record of the conference available to delegates prior to the event.

The Conference Proceedings must:

- Be recognisable as an ACUR document in accordance with the ACUR logo guidelines
- Include each students' institutional affiliation alongside the title of their presentation in the timetable of sessions.
- Be available to all delegates in hard copy and electronic form during and preferably prior to the conference.
- Display information about sponsors.
- Display a document serial number (ISSN) – request from ACUR.

Typically, the proceedings will include:

- an Institutional welcome from a senior university official
- A welcome from the Conference organiser
- Conference Organising Committee names
- a timetable of sessions
- A list of posters and other sessions
- all presenting abstracts
- A map of locations

Please note information regarding the final report (Section 5) sent to the Executive which needs to be completed after the conference. The final report will include a copy of the Conference Proceedings.

4.9 Prizes

Prizes may be awarded at the discretion of the Conference Organising Committee. Typically a small group of experts are asked to form a judging panel who read full papers and attend related sessions.

Posters may be judged by such a panel. (An example evaluation sheet is included in section 1.3) Alternatively, peer evaluation of posters can provide a fun activity for all delegates. For example, they may be given coloured spots and asked to put, say, a red spot on the most interesting poster and a blue one on the most visually appealing (or other criteria and colours may be used). The winning posters are those that gain the highest number of spots!

4.10 Social activities

A dinner is usually arranged for the evening of the first day of the conference. This has been hosted by, for example, a residential college, hosted by the host university's catering department, or a barbeque or other event organised by the conference committee. Note that in some locations September can be cold for outdoor dining. A tradition of following the dinner with a Trivial Quiz or similar fun activity has grown.

4.11 Gaining feedback on conference experience

It is important that we obtain a snapshot of students' responses to the conference. This can be extremely useful in encouraging further engagement with ACUR events and activities including future conferences. When students leave the conference venue it is hard to capture their views. Ways to gain students' views are the following:

- A Comments and suggestions book, or box and slips of paper available on the registration desk throughout the conference.
- A comments wall of Bricks built from slips of sticky paper throughout the conference
- An evaluation sheet available at the final session.
- An evaluation survey in a laptop implemented by a first-year student on the last day
- Social media posts
- All of the above.

4.12 Sponsorship

The ACUR Sponsorship Framework provides guidance on seeking sponsorship. Extracts from that document which relate to Conference Sponsorship have been put together for the use of ACUR Conference Organisers (See section 1.3). Quotations from this document may be used in approaching potential ACUR sponsors but must not be used in other contexts.

Suggestions in the Conference Sponsorship document are not exhaustive and Conference hosts are advised to seek sponsorship widely, e.g. from local tourist offices, key local employers, bookshops, university departments, e.g. library, and other sources.

The ACUR Executive also endeavours to obtain sponsorship for prizes, merchandise and sundries. However, Conference organisers should not rely on these as Executive efforts have not always been successful.

5 FINALISING ADMINISTRATION FOLLOWING THE CONFERENCE-

Following an ACUR conference, Conference Organisers are expected to complete the following:

5.1 Immediately after the conference:

1. Formerly notify prize-winners and send certificates and prizemoney/vouchers to those who did not receive them at the conference.
2. Liaise with sponsors, regarding the recipient of their sponsored prize
3. Send delegates a certificate of participation attached to an email. Certificates of participation could be distributed at the end of the conference. However, those who have left prior to the end of the conference need to be sent their certificates.

5.2 Within two months of the conference

1. Share the findings of the conference evaluation with the Executive.
2. Write an account of the conference for inclusion in the ACUR newsletter (URNA)
3. Prepare a full report of the conference for inclusion on the ACUR website (see example).
   The report should include:
   g. The ACUR identity including the ACUR logo (conforming to the logo guidelines);
   h. Copy of the conference proceedings displayed with links to abstracts and in pdf form;
   i. Photographs;
   j. An account of the conference in terms of range, number and type of presentations, number of universities represented, any special features or notable events;
   k. List of prize-winners; and
   l. Where the best papers will be published.

4. Send the Executive Officer a spreadsheet (see 1.3) of all participants and presenters presentation titles and abstracts and information about supervisors as gathered with submissions. Contact details, e.g. email address is also required as they will be given ACUR student membership for one year following the conference.
5. All data collected on behalf of ACUR for the ACUR conference, remains the property of ACUR
6. Also send to the Executive Officer an electronic copy of the final conference program for inclusion in the ACUR website and archives.
7. Prepare a full statement of costs of the conference and send to the Chair.

8. No later than the end of the calendar year in which the conference is held, to transfer $10 per presenting student to the ACUR bank account and notify the Treasurer when this has been done. Please advise the following for invoice to be created: Name, purchase order number

9. Update website with summary of conference in conjunction with ACUR's Executive officer.

6   APPENDIX: GENERAL INFORMATION

6.1 What is Undergraduate Research?

Undergraduate research refers to a broad range of educational practices where students at any level learn through engaging in a research or inquiry project or process. Typically, in the early years, students may experience research activities and learn techniques within coursework or within designated vacation projects or internships. In later years, students may carry out complete research projects leading to a dissertation or publication. In some cases, a succession of research experiences at undergraduate level are combined to form an undergraduate research degree.

6.2 Why undergraduate research?

Growing interest and practice internationally in engaging undergraduates in research has led to demand from students and academics to provide similar opportunities here in Australasia. There is evidence that practice is growing rapidly. Undergraduate research addresses the need to prepare students for professional life when knowledge is uncertain and the future is unclear. It is known to have high impact in engaging students. The benefits to students are well known and include: personal and professional gains such as increased confidence; and intellectual development including critical thinking and problem solving skills; and a more advanced understanding of how scientific knowledge is built. These skills are as important in business, industry and the professions, as they are in universities.

ACUR Inc Executive
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