



PEAK Experiences Awards: The Trail-Blazer

Dear Prospective Northeastern Faculty Mentors,

The Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships pleased to announce that applications for the Trail-Blazer Award are now open. Trail-Blazer Awards support original, student-initiated independent research, creative performance, and project-making in close collaboration with a faculty mentor. All Northeastern University students in good academic standing and with a GPA of at least 3.5 are eligible to apply for individual or group Trail-Blazer Awards of up to \$5,000 to be used during the summer. This is a competitive fellowship and funding is not guaranteed.

The Trail-Blazer differs in tenor and intent from the other PEAK Experiences Awards which are also offered during the summer term. As Northeastern's most generous undergraduate research awards, providing up to \$5,000 in funding, Trail-Blazers require students – as individuals or in groups – to demonstrate a high degree of independence in project development and execution and to commit at least nine weeks of full-time work to the project.

As part of the application process, students receive training in how to craft and carry out research proposals. Applicants must demonstrate autonomy in project design and implementation. Trail-Blazer Awards are not intended to be used for research assistantships or as a substitute for a grant-funded position. In the case of the sciences and engineering, the projects can be carried out in close collaboration with a faculty sponsor. However, there should be a distinction between the faculty member's funded research and that of the Trail-Blazer applicant. Priority will be given to projects where students are making their own clearly defined intellectual contributions.

Mentors play a key role in the conceptualization and execution of Trail-Blazer projects and we are enormously grateful for your generous support. Trail-Blazer mentors are expected to help students narrow or expand the scope of the project as appropriate; approve the student's mentoring plan, outlining the expected frequency and mode of communication; write a letter of recommendation in support of the final Trail-Blazer proposal; provide feedback on the student's progress toward completion of the project, including through a brief mid-summer survey; and sign off on a final product and short report on the project. Importantly, faculty mentors are expected to ensure the project's compliance with university guidelines related to the ethical and safe

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conduct of research. This means ensuring the project's compliance with IRB and IACUC as relevant and taking into account student safety, in terms of project location and design. We rely on faculty members to verify a project's intellectual merit and feasibility; if you have significant concerns about a project please raise them with the student, our office, and in your letter, should you choose to write it.

Mentors receive a complementary membership to the Council on Undergraduate Research and are warmly invited to the fall Creative Endeavor and Research Experience Symposium, where awardees present their work to the Northeastern community in a festive atmosphere.

Mentors are also encouraged to help students locate appropriate venues for external review of their work.

When the student applies for a Trail-Blazer Award, the application system will send the designated faculty mentor an email requesting a letter of recommendation, with instructions for uploading it. The letter should comment on:

- the faculty advisor's involvement with the project
- the student's initiative, motivation, and determination for the proposed project
- the quality, originality, and worthiness of the proposal
- the arrangements to ensure completion of the project
- the status of any IRB or IACUC processes
- the safety of the project, in terms of its location and the project itself

Thank you for your support of this student and the work of our Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships. Please contact our office with any questions or concerns you might have at 617.373.3202 or by e-mail at URF@northeastern.edu.

Best wishes,



Jonna Iacono, Ph.D.
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