

SPARC Graduate Research Grant

Support to Promote Advancement of Research and Creativity

For Faculty Advisors

Details, Documents, and USCera Submission Process

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FACULTY ELIGIBILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY OVERVIEW

Faculty Advisor Eligibility

- **Faculty advisors may only sponsor two SPARC applications each year.**
Each faculty advisor can sponsor only two student SPARC applications each year (i.e., only two students per faculty advisor may apply for SPARC each year). Faculty may not circumvent this rule by sponsoring two students and then having other faculty sponsor additional students for whom they are the primary doctoral advisor.
- **The Faculty advisor for the SPARC grant is expected to be the student’s primary Advisor** for their dissertation or thesis. Exceptions to this policy are limited. Should an exception be necessary, please see the section below [Situations Requiring Additional Documentation](#)
- **The Faculty advisor must be a current USC faculty member.**

Former USC faculty members who are no longer employed by the university are not eligible to be a PI on a SPARC grant and are not eligible to oversee SPARC projects. Letters of recommendation written by former USC faculty members will not be accepted.

- ***If the faculty advisor is on extended leave or sabbatical during the SPARC project***, a co-PI must be appointed to help oversee the project. See [*Situations Requiring Additional Documentation*](#)

Faculty Responsibility for SPARC Grant Submission Process

- reviewing and signing the Current and Pending Support Form (see note below regarding alternative signatories)
- confirming and signing the Authorship and GPA Certification Form
- writing a **max 2-page** letter of recommendation following the guidance below
- submitting the SPARC proposal application in USCeRA by the 5pm deadline stated on the webpage (submission tips/process [below](#))

CURRENT AND PENDING SUPPORT FORM

Please review this form, confirm the information provided is accurate, and sign. Alternatively, this form can be signed by the Department Chair, Program Director, or department/program designee.

Note: If the student is receiving compensation (salary, health insurance, etc.) from a larger grant, only the amount allotted to the student should be listed under “Dollar amount of Support.”

AUTHORSHIP AND GPA CERTIFICATION FORM

By signing this form, you are confirming that the student was the primary author of the proposal and that the GPA listed on the form is accurate as of the date of submission for the student’s current degree program.

GUIDANCE FOR WRITING THE FACULTY LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of Recommendation must be written by a current USC faculty member. The SPARC PI is normally the student’s primary advisor for their dissertation, exceptions to this are possible – please see [*situations requiring additional documentation*](#) below. Letters of Recommendation written by former USC faculty who are no longer employed by the university will not be accepted.

Letters of Recommendation must be no longer than **two pages** and submitted on faculty or department letterhead. Letters which are very general and/or vague are not helpful to the review committee. The review committee has requested that Letters of Recommendation address the bulleted topics listed below. Each proposal should include only one Letter of Recommendation.

- The letter should include the following:
 - How long you have known the student
 - Student’s anticipated graduation date
 - Evaluate the student’s degree of independence, both generally and specifically in the preparation of this proposal
 - Assess student’s intellectual ability, creativity, and critical thinking skills
 - Assess feasibility of project completion based on student’s degree of preparation and motivation
 - Discuss the significance of this funding for the student’s dissertation or thesis, i.e. how will this project impact the student’s progress towards degree completion

- Any other information of which the committee should be aware (including *Situations Requiring Additional Documentation* described below)
- Please give **one** of the following overall ratings of the student for a SPARC Graduate Research Grant
 - Very Strongly Recommend
 - Recommend with Confidence
 - Recommend with Reservations
 - Do Not Recommend
- Save as PDF or MS Word file and append to the end of student's proposal.
- Save entire proposal package as **one** PDF or Word document file.
- The document file must be named with the following convention:
Last Name_First Name-YEAR of anticipated award (example Doe_Jane-2026)

Situations Requiring Additional Documentation

❖ Student's Primary Advisor is not the SPARC project faculty advisor

The Faculty Advisor on the proposal should be the student's Primary Advisor for their dissertation or thesis. If the project Faculty Advisor (and PI in USCeRA) will not be the student's Primary Advisor, the application must include a letter of support from the student's Primary Advisor stating approval for another faculty member to serve as the Faculty Advisor for the SPARC grant. Alternatively, the student's dissertation or thesis committee may approve the appointment of a USC Faculty Advisor who is not the Primary Advisor. In this case, the application must include a letter of support from the Chair of the Dissertation or Thesis Committee stating the committee's approval for a faculty member other than the Primary Advisor to serve as Faculty Advisor (and PI in USCeRA) for this grant. When submitting the SPARC Graduate Research Grant proposal, this letter of support should be appended to the proposal and immediately precede the SPARC Faculty Advisor Letter of Recommendation.

❖ Faculty advisor on leave or sabbatical during the SPARC project timeline

If the Faculty Advisor anticipates being on leave or sabbatical during the SPARC grant timeframe, a co-PI must be appointed to help oversee the project. This must be stated in the Letter of Recommendation and the co-PI must provide a Letter of Support indicating their commitment.

❖ Student Requests Funds to Attend a Short Course

The student may request funds to cover the expenses related to a short course or training. The Faculty Advisor must state in the Letter of Recommendation that 1) the course is essential to the student's research project and 2) that the course will help advance the dissertation/thesis research.

❖ Student requests funds or requires permission/arrangement to use resources, equipment, facilities, etc. not directly available through Advisor; these may or may not be affiliated USC

The Faculty Advisor should state in the Letter of Recommendation that 1) this is necessary for the proposed work, and 2) the Faculty Advisor has spoken with the Facility Manager or Director, and this person has agreed to the arrangement and/or to allow the student to use/access.

SUBMITTING THE SPARC PROPOSAL IN USCeRA

- **Faculty Advisor writes Letter of Recommendation.**
- **Attach the completed Faculty Letter of Recommendation to the end of student's proposal.**
- Create **ONE document (PDF or MS Word)** containing the following documents **in this order**:
 - Resubmission narrative (only if resubmitting)
 - Reviewer comments from previous submission (only if resubmitting)
 - Proposal Narrative (3-page max; if not a resubmission, the narrative is the first part of the package)
 - Bibliography (2-page max)
 - Budget Form
 - Current and Pending Support Form
 - CV/Biographical Sketch (2-page max)
 - Authorship and GPA Certification Form
 - Letter of Support for Participant Incentives (required if requesting participant incentives)
 - Optional Letter(s) of Support from special collaborators, resource agreements, etc. (see student application guidelines)
 - *If USC faculty member other than student's primary advisor is acting as faculty advisor for administration of the SPARC graduate research grant*, a Letter of Support from the student's Primary Advisor or the Chair of the Thesis/Dissertation Committee must immediately precede the Faculty Letter of Recommendation.
 - Letter of Recommendation from faculty advisor (required for all proposals)
- **The application file must be named:** Last Name_First Name-YEAR of anticipated award (example Doe_Jane-2026)
- **Please do not scan the entire proposal. Proposals may be submitted as MS Word or PDF documents.**

Login to USCeRA (<https://sam.research.sc.edu/uscera/>).

Use your university username and password to log into USCeRA.

Create New Proposal - Proposal / Award Processing Form (PAP)

- At the top of the USCeRA homepage, in the garnet area, select "Proposals"
- From the dropdown menu, click on "+Create New Proposal." This will take you to the "Create New Proposal" page
- Complete the fields as follows (this will become part of the Proposal Summary):

Basic Information

1. **Title:** Proposal title in USCeRA must follow this format (Please do not write the title in all caps):
SPARC: Student First and Last Name: Proposal Title
Example: SPARC: Sue Smith: The many ways that research at USC is the best

The title in USCeRA must follow this format exactly so that proposals can be found and sorted in USCeRA based on the student's name and association with SPARC.

2. **Primary Awardee Department:** should fill automatically with your department; if there is a problem, please email Debbie Kassianos (KASSIANO@sc.edu).
 - Please note, SPARC funds follow the faculty mentor's home department listed in USCeRA. If a faculty member has a dual appointment, the "Primary Awardee Department" can be changed using the dropdown on the PAP (Proposal Award Processing) Form in USCeRA and choose the appropriate department.
3. **Type:** Select New (if a new proposal) or Revision (if the proposal was previously submitted to the SPARC Program and revised for this round)
4. **Grants.gov Workspace ID:** leave this blank
5. **Start Date:** May 1 of next year
6. **End Date:** July 31 of the *following* year
7. **Agency Deadline Type:** select *Receipt* and *enter the SPARC application deadline from the webpage*

Click on the green "Continue" button

New Proposal: "SPARC: Student name: Title of proposal" is now at top of page

Source of Project and Sponsor

*****This section is critical. If not completed properly, the proposal will not be identified as a SPARC grant in USCeRA and will NOT be forwarded for review***

1. **Is this an internal Request?**
Select "Yes"
 - a. **Internal Request Office**
Select Vice President for Research
 - i. **Internal Request Type**
Select SPARC Graduate Research Grant

Questions 2-4 Sponsor information should automatically populate the form

Click on the green "Continue" button

Personnel

NOTE: only use the "+Add Personnel" button if there are additional USC faculty/staff who are providing significant co-mentoring, supervising, or advising of the student applicant on this project. Do not add the student's name here.

Under "SPARC Graduate Research Grant Students"

Click on the "+Add Student" button: *this will open a pop-up box*

- enter student first name, last name, email address* and department

*Please enter the student's university email address - this is the email address used to send reviewer comments and program information to your student. **Please double-check and ensure the student's email address is entered correctly** – *this is the only email we will have for contacting your student.*

Click green "Continue" button - this will save the student's information, close the pop up, and bring you back to the main Personnel page.

Please review the student's information to confirm it saved in the system. If it did not, continue with the submission and email the information to Debbie Kassianos (kassianos@sc.edu) who can add this on the admin side. *Thank you!*

Click green "Continue" button

Costs

Project Costs

1. Amount Requested for First or Current Year

Enter the amount requested, up to \$5000. Do not enter a number higher than \$5000 or the proposal will be disapproved.

2. Project Years

Enter "1" (this field only allows whole numbers. Please enter 1 regardless of total project months.)

3. Total Amount Requested for All Project Years

Enter the amount requested, up to \$5000. **Do not enter a number higher than \$5000 or the proposal will be disapproved.**

Click green "Continue" button

? Questions

Answer yes/no as appropriate - you must answer all questions.

Special situations:

- **Cost Share in Proposal (i.e. matching funds)? Select No.**
Matching funds are not allowed.
- **Human Subjects? If TRUE, select YES (approval is not required for submission)**
 - Select YES even if you do not yet have IRB approval.
 - An Approval # text box will appear.
 - If you have a number already for this project, enter the number.
 - Otherwise type in "pending"
- **Vertebrate animals? If TRUE, select YES (approval is not required for submission)**
 - Select Yes even if you do not yet have Animal Use Approval.
 - An Approval # text box will appear.
 - If you have a number already for this project, enter the number and Approval Date as prompted.
 - Otherwise type in "pending" and leave Approval Date blank

Click green "Continue" button

Congratulations, the Proposal/Award Processing Form (PAP) form is saved and complete. You should now be brought to the “Proposal Summary” page. Next step...

Completing the Internal Commit Form

On the Proposal Summary page, scroll down, under the section My Forms (left side of page), click on **Internal Commit**

NOTE: This form indicates a proposal is REQUESTING funds from USC (an internal funding source), which includes the SPARC Graduate Research Grant program. It does NOT indicate a need for cost-sharing from your department or college.

In the text box beside Year 1, enter the total amount requested for the SPARC Grant award (max of \$5000). Do not enter a number higher than \$5000 or the proposal will be disapproved. Click <ENTER>

All other squares and boxes should be blank. Total will auto-fill.

Leave all text fields blank.

Scroll to the bottom of the page and click <SAVE> or <UPDATE>.

This will bring you back to the “Proposal Summary” page and the Internal Commit form under My Forms will now have a status of **✓Complete**.

NOTE: Under the My Forms section, if you see “Administrative Information,” please leave as is – do not change or edit. This may not be present, but if so, it may be listed as complete or incomplete. A status of incomplete will NOT affect the submission.

Upload the SPARC Graduate Research Grant proposal

NOTE: **please submit as ONE word or PDF document**. Do not scan. Do not submit separate files.

- On the lower right side of the “Proposal Summary” page, there is an “Uploaded Documents” section (to the right of “All Forms”)
- Click on “ Upload Document”. This will bring you to a new page.
- Under “Category,” select “Proposal/Proposal Summary” or “Other.” This allows you to upload the SPARC proposal as one document (**please do not upload separate or multiple documents**).
- Under “New Upload,” Click on “Browse.” This will open a pop-up.
- In the pop-up box, select the student’s proposal from where it is saved in your computer or USB drive.
- Click on “Open.”
- The name of the student’s file will appear to the right of “Choose File.”
- Click on the red “Upload” button.
- This should take you back to the Proposal Summary page and the file will now be listed under “Uploaded Documents”.

Start the approval process

At this point, everything should be ready (*See screen capture below*): 1) Student name listed; 2) under My Forms, both the Proposal Award Processing and Internal Commit Forms should have a status of “Complete;” and 3) the proposal should be listed under “Uploaded Documents.”

Title

"SPARC: Jane Smith: Seasonal Nutrient Cycling in Charleston Harbor, SC"

Project Status Not Submitted Type New Dates 05/01/2021 - 07/31/2022 Awardee Department Biological Sciences Internal Request Type SPARC Graduate Research Grant	Lead PI Dr. Lauren Clark Current & Pending Office Research - General	Tools Audit Trail + Add Note ✕ Delete This Proposal ! Post Sponsor Revision Print Cover Page						
Uploaded Documents <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Jones_A.pdf</td> <td>✕ Delete</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>30.6 KB</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dr. Lauren Clark</td> <td>08/19/2020</td> </tr> </table>			Jones_A.pdf	✕ Delete	Other	30.6 KB	Dr. Lauren Clark	08/19/2020
Jones_A.pdf	✕ Delete							
Other	30.6 KB							
Dr. Lauren Clark	08/19/2020							
▶ Start Approval Process								
My Forms <table border="1"> <tr> <td> Administrative Information USC/SCRF USC Grant/Contract Grant </td> <td>✓ Complete</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Proposal/Award Processing Form (PAP) View Report ▶ </td> <td>✓ Complete</td> </tr> <tr> <td> Internal Commit </td> <td>✓ Complete</td> </tr> </table>			Administrative Information USC/SCRF USC Grant/Contract Grant	✓ Complete	Proposal/Award Processing Form (PAP) View Report ▶	✓ Complete	Internal Commit	✓ Complete
Administrative Information USC/SCRF USC Grant/Contract Grant	✓ Complete							
Proposal/Award Processing Form (PAP) View Report ▶	✓ Complete							
Internal Commit	✓ Complete							
For external proposal submissions please upload the following documents, as well as any other necessary support documents: - Proposal/Proposal Summary - Budget/Budget Justification Upload Document								

Select the red "Start Approval Process" button above the "My Forms" box.

- A Confirm Proposal Submission pop-up will appear that says "Are you sure..."
 - Click on "Submit Proposal."
 - A note will appear at the top of your USCeRA main page stating that the proposal has been successfully submitted with a proposal number listed.
- Please note that the 5pm requirement on the deadline date is for submission of the completed application/proposal INTO USCeRA (=clicking on the "Start approval process" button).
- Electronic signatures from the Chair and Dean can occur later. They are notified automatically by the system of pending applications.

If you have questions, problems, or do not see a proposal number in USCeRA, please contact

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