

# ▶ From Student



BY RACHEL CARLSON

PHOTOGRAPH BY NICK CLINE | ILLUSTRATIONS BY TUBA SHAHBAZ



**IN THE SPRING OF 2022**, Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business launched its Undergraduate Research Assistant (UGRA) Program, aimed at fostering a dynamic research culture while providing invaluable support to faculty. This innovative initiative not only enriches students' academic journeys but also bolsters HSB's commitment to excellence in research and education, aligning with the school's broader initiative of purposeful research.

"The purpose of the UGRA Program is twofold," said Mitch Neubert, PhD, senior associate dean for Research and Faculty Development. "One is to get students involved in research to understand the research process.

Second, it's designed for those students to help faculty with their research and be exposed to research—a learning experience as well as support for faculty."

As an R1 institution, Baylor strives to expose students to research and develop a curiosity for the kinds of questions being answered in research, Neubert said. The UGRA Program helps create a culture where students recognize the value of research and the skills it helps develop.

Some of these skills are discussed in Joseph Aoun's book, "Robot-Proof," Neubert said. Aoun emphasizes the crucial role of skills like critical thinking and systems thinking in navigating an increasingly automated world, noting their importance due to artificial intelligence's deficiencies in these areas. Neubert hopes the program expands in HSB to assist students in developing these cognitive skills within the realm of research.

"We would like to grow this so that more students are impacted and more faculty are assisted by this support," he said. "We would love to see it double or triple in size, to where most faculty would have a research assistant they are working with."

Alongside program growth, the Business School is exploring various

avenues to enhance the program's robustness. This includes potential structural changes, such as offering training or orientation sessions beforehand to better prepare students for the program. Additionally, there is the possibility of transforming it into a credited course, providing students with the opportunity to develop these skills in a formal academic setting.

"We are developing a research culture that involves more students and enhances our teaching mission," Neubert said. "The UGRA Program aligns perfectly with our commitment to purposeful research by empowering students to discover solutions through research while honing their skills for future endeavors."

Sandi Stuit, assistant to the senior associate dean, oversees the program's administration and highlighted the importance of prospective students' willingness to learn.

"While prior research experience isn't required, students must be willing to develop skills such as using research databases, research software and survey platforms, along with communicating with research participants and professors," Stuit said.

Since its inception, nearly 50 students have participated, ranging from all majors within the Business School, with 20 students currently partnered with faculty on research projects.

Some students in the program have worked on papers that have been published, presented research and enrolled in research-centered graduate programs. While not every UGRA student experiences these achievements, Neubert and Stuit hope to see more of these accomplishments in the coming years. ■

***For more information or ways to give to the UGRA Program, visit [hankamer.baylor.edu/student-resources/ugra](https://hankamer.baylor.edu/student-resources/ugra).***

# ▶ To Scholar

