



Social-insurance Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF)

Call for Applications - Due Friday, March 4, 2022

SURF Summer Fellowship: May 16 – June 10, 2022

Tentative Schedule: M-W-F 9am-1pm (in-person)

SURF Summer Internship: TBD between June – September

Tentative Schedule: 10-20 hours with Researcher Mentor (virtual)

SURF Overview

The Economics Department at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), in partnership with the [Center for Financial Security \(CFS\)](#) at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, is seeking undergraduate applications for the inaugural cohort of Social-insurance Undergraduate Research Fellows (SURF). SURF is a competitive, four-week, in-person program housed at UIC that will provide promising undergraduate students with an introduction to social insurance; the policies surrounding the social safety net; research investigating these, and their impact on economically vulnerable populations. Following the four-week fellowship, SURF fellows will intern (virtually) with researchers currently funded to investigate these topics.

SURF is a training program supported by CFS, and funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA) under their [Retirement and Disability Research Consortium](#) (RDRC). The Center for Financial Security at UW-Madison is home to one of the four RDRC centers. The [CFS RDRC](#) supports a number of SSA-related research projects, training programs and fellowships each year.

SURF Fellowship

Based at UIC, fellows will meet in-person 12 times total over a four-week period, coinciding with the UIC summer term. The workshop will include student-led and group discussions, readings, guest speakers, lectures and presentations covering:

- **Safety Net Basics:** How much is distributed, and to whom, through social insurance programs? How is the safety net currently working?
- **Social Insurance Research:** An introduction to the big questions social insurance researchers are investigating; for example, What are the costs and benefits of certain approaches? How can we measure/evaluate these costs and benefits?
- **Future Pathways:** What might career paths in this space look like and what graduate education is needed; predoc opportunities, Masters/PhD programs, possible funding opportunities; preparing a successful grad school application; career development
- **Site Visits:** drawing on Chicago resources, SURF fellows will also visit local institutions (e.g. Chicago Federal Reserve) and converse with active economists and public policy analysts embedded in the field.

Fellows will also have work time to focus on coding and data work to bolster their analytic skill sets. Much of this work will be in DataCamp, which can be personalized and completed asynchronously. Fellows may choose to complete certifications in DataCamp, free of charge.



Additionally, we'll create a fellows network that includes SURF fellows, faculty, graduate students, CFS staff and faculty, mentors and speakers who can provide support, make introductions, and serve as a support structure as fellows transition into their graduate studies.

SURF Internship

After the in-person workshop, fellows will be paired with a researcher mentor for a virtual internship. The researchers are teaching at research universities across the country. They have first hand experience with the world of social insurance research and, aside from providing a mentored experience, they can provide a glimpse into a policy-related career.

Fellows will need to complete a deliverable for their research mentor. Possible internship projects could include:

- Writing a one-page policy brief of their research mentor's project
- Crafting a social media communications plan for their research mentor's project
- Creating a set of visuals depicting the results of the research (e.g. using R or Tableau)
- Review project's statistical programming code and learn how and why to improve the code

Upon successful completion of the internship, fellows will be named in acknowledgements of the final paper, which are published on the [CFS RDRC website](#) and included in their UW-Madison [research repository](#).

SURF Schedule

SURF Summer Fellowship: May 16 – June 10, 2022

Tentative Schedule: M-W-F 9am-1pm (in-person)

While the dates are set (May 16 – June 10), the timing of in-person classes could be altered depending on the needs of accepted students. Timing of meetings will be finalized by April 2022. Total class time will likely be 48 hours spread over 12 class periods. Some food will be provided including a light breakfast and lunch. These hours include field trips/site visits. Some non-course time will be required to complete readings and other program assignments.

Program director and program assistants (current UIC doctoral students) will be available for office hours, mentoring, etc at times that are convenient for fellows.

SURF Summer Internship: Summer - Fall 2022

Tentative Schedule: 10-20 hours TBD with Researchers (virtual)

Fellows will be matched with a researcher, and together they will determine the focus of the internship and deliverable. Anticipated hours of internship is 10-20 hours total.

SURF Award

Fellows will receive a \$3,000 stipend to cover the duration of the fellowship and time spent on internship. This is a mentored training program meant to enable fellows to participate in the program on a part-time basis, while also allowing students to pursue summer job opportunities. Fellows will receive their awards directly and are responsible for the tax implications. As such, fellows need to have a Social Security number and will need to complete a W9 form.

SURF Eligibility

The ideal candidate will have strong analytic and communication skills; an interest in economics or other social science fields, public policy, and/or interest in a policy-related career. We are looking for students based in the Chicago area who come from a variety of majors, and those who come from a diversity of backgrounds, including first-generation college students and those from rural communities; students from historically marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, and students with disabilities.

SURF Application

Submit your application online here <https://forms.gle/5ZQbgs9vQOrQrQNM8> **For priority consideration, submit your application by 11:59pm PST on March 4th, 2022.** Staff from UIC and CFS will review and score applications, and notify successful applicants by late March 2022.

SURF Contacts

UIC Contact

Erik Hembre
Assistant Professor, Economics
University of Illinois Chicago
ehembre@uic.edu

CFS Contact

Amy Marsman
Outreach Specialist, Center for Financial Security
University of Wisconsin-Madison
marsman@wisc.edu