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Student outcomes from diverse undergraduate research experiences – findings from a multi-disciplinary study.

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Undergraduate research experiences (UREs) provide students with opportunities to engage in high impact experiential learning. UREs have been especially prevalent in the sciences, but there are now extensive banks of case studies demonstrating the use of UREs as an educationally enriching activity in nearly all disciplines. This study investigated the diversity of UREs available across a wide range of disciplines at a large Australian research-intensive university and examined the perceived benefits. Through group interviews with 68 academics, we gathered detailed information about 81 URE activities, across 28 Schools within the institution (representing 77.8% of Schools), ranging from archaeology to political science, from biology to social work and from law to journalism. The most common URE model observed was that of activities embedded in courses. Across disciplines the most common feature was the requirement for students to engage with the research literature in their field. A smaller number of models incorporated features which allowed students to engage in other high impact learning activities such as community-based activities and internships. Although we identified a large ‘set’ of perceived student outcomes across the varied URE models the generic graduate attributes attained by students through these UREs appeared to be independent of the discipline itself. In most cases, the UREs were available to all students rather than an elite or specialist cohort. This leads us to believe that across a range of disciplinary contexts, there are many ways to use UREs to achieve high levels of engagement of large cohorts of students.

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