

The Value of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity in the Tenure and Promotion Process at Minnesota State University, Mankato

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As a comprehensive public university, Minnesota State Mankato strives to integrate teaching and research in service to the local, regional, and global communities. This mission is reflected in the criteria for evaluation of faculty members, as specified in Article 22 of the faculty contract. In addition to teaching, research, and service, these criteria include contributing to students' growth and development, as well as the faculty member's own professional development and preparation. Perhaps no single activity integrates the five criteria more effectively than undergraduate research, which represents the true blending of teaching and research in ways that benefit students, faculty, and the larger community. As a result, faculty mentorship of undergraduate research and creative activity fulfills multiple purposes in the promotion and tenure process at Minnesota State Mankato. Examples of the ways in which undergraduate research advances both the University's mission and the faculty member's ability to document achievement in each of the five areas specified in Article 22 are listed below.

Criterion 1: Evidence of Ability to Teach Effectively

- The Opportunity for undergraduates to engage in research or creative projects with faculty members has been identified by AACU as one of ten "high-impact" educational practices.
- Undergraduate research is a highly effective pedagogy for teaching course content, as well as interpersonal and trans-disciplinary skills such as creativity, problem solving, and communication skills.
- Mentoring is a particularly powerful form of teaching.

Criterion 2: Evidence of Scholarly or Creative Achievement or Research

- Though the primary focus of undergraduate research is the student's learning and development as a scholar, undergraduates can make important contributions to faculty members' ongoing research projects.
- Undergraduate research, mentored by faculty members, frequently results in conference presentations, performances, exhibitions, or publications—thereby contributing to new knowledge.

Criterion 3: Evidence of Continuing Preparation and Study

- Through the Council for Undergraduate Research (CUR), there are frequent opportunities for faculty members to continue developing their understanding of best practices in undergraduate research.
- Mentoring undergraduate research and creative activity enriches the faculty mentor's understanding of the research and/or creative processes and the most effective ways of teaching these processes.

Criterion 4: Evidence of Contribution to Student Growth and Development

- Research demonstrates that undergraduates who participate in research or creative activity under the mentorship of faculty members experience significant gains in creativity, critical thinking skills, career development, and self-confidence.
- Undergraduates who participate in research or creative activity are also more likely to complete their baccalaureate degrees and to attend graduate school.

Criterion 5: Service to the University and Community

- Many undergraduate research projects are also a form of service learning and, as such, provide valuable assistance to the Mankato community.
- Undergraduates may participate in a variety of supervised internship opportunities at community-based organizations in southern Minnesota, as well as in other states and, in some cases, other countries. These internships allow students to receive academic credit for practical experience assisting community and advocacy groups.

Examples of Effective Practice in Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity:

- Vertical research teams composed of one or more faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduate students representing first, second, third and/or fourth year status.
- Departmental honors theses or creative projects.
- Presentation of undergraduate projects and creative works at the Undergraduate Research Conference, NCUR, and other national and international professional conferences and exhibitions.
- Some students have become co-authors of significant papers published in refereed journals. MSU students in particular have opportunities to publish their reports about undergraduate projects in the MSU, Mankato Journal of Undergraduate Research.
- Individual undergraduate research opportunities are available in many departments at MSU, Mankato. Faculty members in the sciences, for example, offer a variety of opportunities ranging from on-site laboratory research to computer-based genomic studies to field work in distant locations.