

DO STUDENTS UNDERSTAND HOW UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCES IMPROVE THEIR EMPLOYABILITY?

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BACKGROUND

Employers report STEM graduates lack appropriate employability skills and work experience; work-integrated learning (WIL) is an important pedagogical tool to address these deficits. Undergraduate research experiences (UREs) are WIL opportunities, but there is little information on whether students view UREs as employability development vehicles.

AIMS

This study addresses this deficiency by collecting and examining students' reflections on their UREs and their resultant perceived use for increasing employability.

DESIGN AND METHODS

We interviewed five students who had completed 15 UREs in total, asking questions around students' understandings of employability as a construct, their URE-related activities, and how they felt UREs had affected their employability. The data were double coded using an inductively-developed *Nvivo* framework. The framework was validated using a test for inter-rater agreement.

RESULTS

When defining employability, students' responses were varied and underdeveloped. All participants articulated multiple themes and examples of learnings from their UREs, but they struggled to translate these learnings into employability awareness. They recognised that engaging in UREs had improved their employability but could not elaborate on how this occurred.

CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that students could benefit from URE curriculum components that foregrounded employability. The student participants' insights have informed future research into supervisors' perceptions of UREs as employability-development vehicles.

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