

URSA Engage Final Report

Closing communication gaps: Exploring challenges to facilitating undergraduate research programs and promoting administrator collaboration

Students who engage in undergraduate research benefit from a wide range of personal and professional gains, including an increased ability to think analytically (Ishiyama, 2002), defining/refining research, and career interests, and enhanced confidence (Ishiyama, 2002). Promoting undergraduate participation in research also benefits faculty members (i.e. by enhancing research productivity; Hall et al. 2018) and the institution (i.e. by promoting student retention (Ishiyama, 2002)).

At Oregon State University, we have many formal programs that encourage participation in undergraduate research. However, there are few opportunities for the administrators of these programs to collaborate and share best practices (e.g. recruitment and marketing strategies, timelines, and compensation).

In this project, I studied each undergraduate research program at OSU to examine the challenges that program administrators face and to help increase communication between programs. As part of our background research, I helped create and distributed a survey to administrators from each undergraduate research program to get feedback on challenges and assess what sort of event would help improve undergraduate research programming at OSU.

Background research results indicated that program administrators recognized general challenges, including lack of time/money, challenges related to equity/inclusion, institutional communication, and recruitment. We found a common perception that communication/collaboration between those who facilitate undergraduate research programs across OSU could be improved. That is, only 1 of 19 program administrators believed there to be a great deal of communication/collaboration between those who facilitate undergraduate research programs across OSU). Results also showed individual challenges that each program administrator faced including lack of equity & inclusion, knowledge and time & resources. Results provided insight on the event types program administrators would like to participate in. For example, of the 21 people who responded to the survey, 16 felt that learning about other programs at OSU, 14 felt that meeting other program administrators, and 14 felt that having a group discussion about issues related to undergraduate research would be most beneficial. Finally, we found that 18/21 people who responded to the survey expressed interest in staying

connected with the group or program administrators. The next step is to design our event, called “Undergraduate Research Liaisons Gathering,” for May 12th, 2020.

The next step in this project was to organize our event, and facilitate it. The goal of this event was for it to benefit each participating administrator's undergraduate research program by promoting communication and collaboration. We used this event as an opportunity to collect more data to better understand how to overcome faculty challenges regarding undergraduate research. I took notes during the event, and sent out a post analysis assessment. I analyzed data from the post assessment survey to uncover preliminary findings. In doing so we found that 75% of respondents (n=6) felt that this event would influence how they will continue their research program during the pandemic. We also found that 100% of respondents (n=8) said they were likely to follow-up with an event participant about an idea that was shared at the event. Lastly, **50%** of respondents (n=4) said they met 10+ people at the event. The other 50% said they met between 1-9 new people. We also found that the most valuable things program administrator attendees took away from the event included knowledge, connection and resources. The event also proved to specifically affect how program administrators will continue their research program during the pandemic by improving connection, access to resources as well as program adaptation and development.

We also analyzed survey data regarding how program administrators wish to stay connected with. We found that 6 responders would be most likely to participate in a longer-term community of practice (i.e. topical monthly or quarterly meetings), 5 responders would be most likely to participate in a listserv that members of this group could post to (i.e. with program updates, etc) and 4 responders would be most likely to participate in a Canvas page that everyone could interact on (i.e. with program updates, discussions about best practices, etc).

With these preliminary findings we were able to explore the specific impacts of our project as well as potential ideas for future events between program administration. The feedback was overall excited and appreciative for our work in bringing the Oregon State University undergraduate research program administrative community together in the midst of the isolating Covid-19 pandemic. We have invited all program administrators to URSA weekly meeting with Sophie Pierszaloski, the OSU Associate Director of Undergraduate Research and my URSA Engage mentor. Next fall, we plan to continue working together to facilitate more events to improve collaboration/connection between program administration seeing that our efforts were well received and impactful. We summarized that lack of communication is a central issue that we will continue to address. Communication between program administrators will benefit each individual program as well as the institution.

The experiences that I have gained through the URSA Engage Program and my mentor Sophie have been extremely valuable. I have gained research skills, presentation skills, meaningful connections, data analysis skills, survey skills and communication skills. It has been an extremely rewarding experience to help conduct meaningful work that promotes human connection and collaboration during this global pandemic. Sophie is an amazing role model to have in my life who I really look up to. I had never been involved in research prior to this experience and was slightly intimidated to enter the research world being a sociology, liberal arts major with no experience. However, Sophie made it a positive experience the whole way as she guided me through the entire process. She made me feel like research was something I could be good at and provided me with the resources and information I needed to be successful with my project. I soon learned that undergraduate research is something anyone can do if they are interested and are willing to do the work. It was very fun to participate in a project that applied to the real world and specifically the undergraduate research community at OSU. After having had this experience, I have realized that I really enjoy the academic research process and that it is something I definitely want to continue within my undergrad and hopefully master's program at OSU. The experience I have gained will help me as a university student, in my future career path and potentially with any future research projects.

References

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Ishiyama J. (2002). Does early participation in undergraduate students benefit social science and humanities students? *Journal of College Students*, 36(3): 380-386.