Expected Outcomes: Improved communication on UG research benefits

A goal of the URP is to provide a clearinghouse for information about research opportunities available to Auburn undergraduates and the benefits of participating. The anticipated outcome is that students will be better informed of research opportunities both on campus and off campus in a timely manner, and this will increase their chances to participate in active learning experiences.

Assessment methods

Method: Website tracking and session attendance

Since the inception of the Undergraduate Research office, a website specifically designed to communicate information about the undergraduate research program and associated research opportunities has been created and is updated weekly. In addition, we use a Facebook page to inform students about on campus and off-campus research opportunities and programmatic activities. Improved communication about opportunities is currently being measured using tracking methods, such as the number of likes and consumptions on Facebook and the history of visits to our webpage. Attendance records for attendees at undergraduate research information sessions and faculty programs are also used as indicators.

Findings:

Results of our assessment methods show that the number of “likes” of the Facebook page roughly doubled (from 148 to 278) in the one-year period of Sept 2011 to Sept 2012. These data demonstrate that the page is reaching a larger audience than it did one year ago. Consumptions on the Facebook page record the number of unique user clicks on any link posted on the page. A total of 472 consumptions were recorded over the past year (Sept 2011-Sept 2012). These data suggest that the postings are of interest to our target audience and they are using the information. Tracking of the UGR webpage has been in operation only for one month (Sept 22-Oct 22, 2012). During this period the page recorded 926 views, 459 visits and 270 unique visitors. 54% of visitors were local, with the majority of the rest coming from the state of Alabama.

How did you use findings for improvement?

Our findings indicate that social media and webpages are reaching a sizable fraction of our intended audience. We will continue to track interest in our social media pages and use it to develop a comprehensive database for improving the UGR program by better aiming our programming to student interest. We will continue to seek out and post research opportunities for Auburn students, who indicate that they are interested in this information.

Additional comments:

In addition to these findings, the URP, in conjunction with the Office of University Writing, distributed over 2000 copies of its first issue of the Auburn University Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship (launched in April 2012). The journal communicates the results of Auburn’s undergraduate research endeavors to Auburn stakeholders and provides students with an opportunity to experience the publication and peer-review process. We will seek to expand the number of quality submissions to the undergraduate research journal in the upcoming years.
Expected Outcomes: Active participation in undergraduate research

A goal of the URP is to facilitate opportunities for undergraduates to participate in mentored research. The anticipated outcome is that academically talented students will seek out and be involved in mentored research through structured programs, such as the Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program and other College/School research fellowship programs, and through other on-campus or curricular activities, such as independent study, research-based courses, or part-time employment.

Assessment methods

Method: Analysis of NSSE data

The URP uses results from the NSSE survey to determine participation levels in undergraduate research by the number of students who report having “done” research. The NSSE data also allow us to assess trends regarding participation and to identify populations where participation is low. In addition to institutional assessment by NSSE, records of student participation in the Undergraduate Research Fellowship Program and the research fellowship programs offered by AU Schools and Colleges (CMB, COSAM, Liberal Arts, etc.) are archived and year-to-year trends are examined.

Findings:

Based results from the most recent NSSE survey, students at Auburn University are not significantly different than peer institutions in terms of their participation in undergraduate research. NSSE data examined from 2007 to 2011 indicate a steady rise to an 8% in 2011 of seniors who report have worked on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements. Data compiled on participation in the Undergraduate Research Forum indicate a rise in presentations and submitted abstracts from 49 in 2011 to 96 in 2012, with the bulk coming from STEM disciplines.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We sought to maintain or improve the level of involvement indicated by the NSSE results by continuing to hold information sessions that describe research opportunities, program requirements, and benefits of research participation. We worked with CLA faculty and Deans to promote research in Liberal and Fine Arts by offering targeted sessions. In addition, the URP director has worked with the COSAM and Agriculture Deans and ADRs to coordinate research fellowship programs and boost broad participation in the undergraduate forum. This year the URO worked with the CoAg to help establish a new undergraduate research fellowship program offering 2 fellowships to expand participation.

Additional comments:

In summer of 2012, we began a survey of the schools and colleges to (1) estimate the percentage of students participating in undergraduate research, (2) to determine research-related course offerings, and (3) to estimate the percentage of undergraduate students who are authors on professional publications. This study is not yet complete; however, we will use the results, when available, to improve the UGR program and to provide baseline information.

Expected Outcomes: Improved educational experience

Data from studies indicate that undergraduate research is a high-impact educational experience that enhances student learning. The anticipated outcome from student involvement in undergraduate research is that students will report greater satisfaction with their educational experience and gains in problem solving and critical thinking.
Assessment methods

Method: NSSE and Fellowship Assessment Survey

The URP uses results of the NSSE to assess self-reported benefits of the undergraduate research experience. In addition, the URP assesses the impact of the undergraduate research experience by an end-of-experience survey administered to the participants of the Undergraduate Research Fellowship program.

Findings:

Data from the NSSE survey indicate that participation has risen since 2007 and this suggests that more students are seeking to have a research experience. Feedback on exit surveys from students participating in the Undergraduate Fellowship program have indicated great satisfaction from the program. Students report gains in thinking critically, increased tolerance for overcoming obstacles, and developing professional skill. A few report problems with the research mentor or discovering that the research direction is not the right one for them.

How did you use findings for improvement?

We began working with development officers to expand undergraduate research opportunities on campus so that more students can benefit from the experience. We are also developing materials for effective mentoring that will improve the educational experience of the student.

Additional comments:

The views expressed indicate overall satisfaction with the UGR program and fellowship program.