History and Background

The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) was started in 1989 as a program to improve the retention of historically underrepresented students through the creation of student/faculty research partnerships. The program focuses on early engagement of students in research reaching out to first and second year students. The students work as research assistants to faculty developing more independence as they continue on with the projects. UROP celebrated its 21st birthday last year now reaching adulthood. In 1988, 14 students participated in the program with 14 faculty partners in the psychology department. This year we will have 1300 student participants working with researchers in all of the University of Michigan’s schools and colleges across all academic fields and disciplines.

Student Participants: First and second year students in all schools and colleges interested in all academic disciplines. Approximately 85% of student participants are enrolled in the University's College of Literature, Science and the Arts. The second largest cohort is from the College of Engineering. UROP began as a program open only to underrepresented students, it is now open to all students because of the important value we place on both early engagement and the integration of research and undergraduate education. However, the program continues to target diverse students in our recruitment activities. We also have a Research Scholars program for students in their second year of UROP participation and a small junior/senior program for students who have not yet had a research opportunity on campus.

Faculty Participants: Faculty, research scientists and postdoctoral fellows participate in the program from all schools and colleges on campus including our graduate professional schools.

Program Components

Faculty/Student Research Partnerships
Students work with faculty research partners on ongoing faculty research projects for either academic credit or work-study funding for an average of 8-12 hours per week.

Peer Advisors
Each UROP student is assigned a peer advisor who is a junior/senior alum of the program who helps them find projects, advises them on academic issues, and deals with research related problems that arise as well as other transition issues. The peer advisors also facilitate biweekly research seminars on research related topics.

Research Seminars
Students attend biweekly research seminars facilitated by their peer advisors based on common academic interests, e.g. Social Science, Humanities, Life Sciences and Biomedical, Engineering/Physical Science, and Natural Science.

Research Skill Building Workshops
UROP offers over 50 skill building workshops annually covering such topics as SPSS, STATA, InDesign, Matlab, Excel, Laboratory Safety, Archival Research, Use of Animals in Research, EndNote, RefWorks, ARC GIS, etc.

Research Symposia
UROP students have opportunities to present their research at several annual research symposia including a program wide symposia at the end of the year.

Impact of UROP

Student Retention
UROP improves the retention of historically underrepresented students especially African American male students.

Creating a Postsecondary Pipeline
An undergraduate research experience is the single most important factor in students attending graduate or professional school regardless of race and gender.

Student behavior and attitudes
UROP students are much more proactive about their education, see the university as supportive, faculty as helpful, network more than non-UROP students, and study more.

Lessons Learned

Early engagement is critical to student success and pursuit of graduate education and also has become a program strength in terms of faculty realizing the long term benefit of early research training.

Research Skill building and peer mentorship are integral to the program’s long term success and reputation on campus.

The ability for students to apply financial aid to research enables a diverse group of students to participate in undergraduate research who otherwise might be excluded.

Program Awards and Recognition

Hesburgh Award for Excellence in Faculty Development in Undergraduate Teaching, National Science Foundation Recognition Award for the Integration of Research and Teaching, the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mentoring in Science, Math and Engineering.

For more information

Please contact Sandra Gregerman at sgreger@umich.edu or Angela M. Locks at alocks@csulb.edu for information on this and related projects.