ABSTRACT

A Lack of Undergraduate Research Experiences in the Humanities

The discrepancy in the number of humanities opportunities for undergraduate research experience, as compared with that in the sciences, is well-documented. Studies have both confirmed the lack and reconsidered definitions of opportunities for undergraduate research in order to make faculty/student collaborations feasible and relevant for the humanities.

In “Undergraduate Research in the Humanities: Challenges and Prospects,” Mark S. Schwartz summarizes the scholarly dialogue that took place at the 2008 conference of the same name. Noting the common understanding that humanities’ professional structures deter scholars from collaborating with students as well as each other in research, Schwartz calls for a shift that will benefit both students and professors: “Humanities scholars need to process, share and work to create the kinds of bureaucratic models that will promote research communities” (27).

In “Researching Undergraduate Research in the Humanities,” Reed Wilson confirms the short-comings of the existing model. He quotes from the 1998 Boyer Report Commission’s follow-up commentary: “The science and engineering curricula are well ahead of the social sciences, humanities, and arts, in adapting to undergraduate research as a teaching method” (79). Pointing to currently inadequate models for humanities’ faculty load and research funding, Wilson recommends moving toward salary structures that treat research mentorship as part of regular faculty responsibility as well as research funding models that support such collaborations. Further, noting that research is often defined differently in the humanities than in the sciences, Wilson suggests that humanities disciplines employ definitions that recognize the value of what they do: “Even within our discipline, the word ‘research’ has been problematic... We need to point out that in all disciplines, research is not just finding something that already exists, but an endless, process of discovery that creates knowledge, one in which subject and object interact to create new structures of reality” (77). Revising salary and research funding structures to better support undergraduate research and determining discipline-relevant outcomes for each discipline will enable the humanities to close the gap and better serve students.

Finally, to ensure effective research opportunities for students, it is imperative that humanities disciplines engage in valid assessment of undergraduate research in their areas. As of now, according to Chris Croney, et al., “Comparing disciplinary areas finds fewer assessments of undergraduate research in the social sciences and humanities than the natural sciences” (2). To employ this teaching method responsibly over time, humanities offerings must gather data indicating whether outcomes are being met and respond to that data to improve practices.

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Promoting Undergraduate Research in the Humanities

Tanya Long Bennett • Department of English • University of North Georgia • Dahlonega, GA

ABSTRACT

Promoting Undergraduate Research in the Humanities

Case Study: A Scholarly Collaboration Between Timothy Bellows and Tanya Long Bennett

In spring 2013, student Timothy Bellows produced a freshman composition research paper entitled, “Cryptomnesia: The Grey Area of Plagiarism.” Since I was working simultaneously on a proposal to revise our departmental plagiarism policies, I invited Tim to collaborate with me on a presentation for English faculty on four UNG campuses, scheduled for August 14, 2013. After expanding his part of the research to include cultural variance in attitudes toward intellectual property, Tim and I spent several work sessions composing and revising our presentation, “Approaching Plagiarism in the 21st Century Academy.”

After the presentation, Tim completed the Undergraduate Research Assessment Self-Report (below). We plan to submit a revised version of the project for co-presentation at the March 2014 Teaching Matters Conference at Gordon State College. Tim’s completed Self-Report indicates that his undergraduate research experience so far has yielded several of the above-noted benefits. As this experience has occurred early in his undergraduate career, I expect that his undergraduate experience as a whole will be shaped by these benefits. His attitude toward his future research projects will likely be more professional and the work more meaningful than it would otherwise have been.

Although I was not given a course-release for this and similar work with students, I will be given professional service credit for the faculty presentation as well as faculty development credit for the professional conference presentation. Tim’s conference expenses will be funded by UNG’s Center for Undergraduate Research, and my own costs will be compensated either through release for this and similar work or through presentation as well as faculty development credit for the professional conference.

Benefits of Undergraduate Research

For the Humanities as well as for the Sciences

• Higher rates of persistence in studies
• Higher rates of graduation to continue graduate school
• Improved research skills
• Increased meaningful interaction with faculty and peers
• Improved professional understanding and performance
• Development of problem-solving skills and critical thinking
• Higher level of satisfaction with educational experience

(Seymour, et al., 2004; and Bennett and Bauer, 2003)

Collaborative research with social science and humanities faculty positively influences self-reported gains in independent analytical development... Research experience with subsequent conference presentation of results was the most important activity in improving intent and subsequent admission to graduate school

(Chorley, et al. 2-5)

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Finally, to ensure effective research opportunities for students, it is imperative that humanities disciplines engage in valid assessment of undergraduate research in their areas. As of now, according to Chris Croney, et al., “Comparing disciplinary areas finds fewer assessments of undergraduate research in the social sciences and humanities than the natural sciences” (2). To employ this teaching method responsibly over time, humanities offerings must gather data indicating whether outcomes are being met and respond to that data to improve practices.