

## Issues in Comparing Institutional Practices & Policies

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### *Introduction:*

In this summary I will pose a number of questions that are intended to aid the reader when attempting to compare undergraduate research/inquiry experiences from one context to another. A number of specific institutions and individuals are referred to in this document. These are references to the institutional posters that were presented as part of the Council of Undergraduate Research Symposium in Liverpool 2010.

In comparing practices and policies between institutions, particularly in an international context, you must initially consider differences in language. Do not assume that what you mean by staff, faculty, course, or program means the same in a different context. A lot of aggravation can be alleviated by determining clarity about the meaning of key words at the initial stage of comparison.

The issues are grouped into three sections. The first section includes issues for consideration upon initial inception or encounter of a practice or policy. The second section includes issues that surround the institutional culture. The final section encompasses issues that arise when considering how to sustain an undergraduate research/inquiry initiative. In each section a series of questions are asked and posters that relate to the questions posed are identified. The list of questions and the posters identified are not an exhaustive mapping but rather a snapshot to provide the reader some insight in to the breadth and depth of the different issues.

### *Inception:*

Four questions that should be considered when initially comparing institutional practices and policies are:

1. Is there an institutional champion? Do you need a champion?
2. How amenable are administrator (senior managers)/funders to the initiative?
3. How much prior knowledge do the students have in research/inquiry?
4. Are the conditions similar at your institution to commence this initiative?

Many of the initiatives that are described on the posters have an institutional champion. A champion is an individual or group of individuals that have advocated for the initiative and have provided a level of consistency through the development of the idea. They often provide the motivation necessary to ensure the initiative initially succeeds. Few of the initiatives that are described would have been successful without the financial support provided by administration (senior managers) or by fund raising initiatives. McConnaughay, Morris and Wolffe describe an initiative at Bradley University, USA that integrated high school student and K-12 educators in undergraduate research. When these students reach university will they have a different starting point than students who have not previously encountered research? Understanding the previous experiences and cultural backgrounds of your students will assist in understanding the prior knowledge competency in research/inquiry of your students.

### *Institutional Culture:*

Four questions about institutional culture that should be considered when comparing institutional practices and policies are:

1. What is the perceived appropriate role of undergraduate students in research/inquiry on your campus?
2. What is the perceived appropriate role of instructional staff in undergraduate research/inquiry on your campus? Are the student:instructional staff ratios similar at your institution and the one to which you are comparing?
3. What is considered acceptable output of undergraduate research/inquiry on your campus/in your discipline?
4. Is there any institutional arrogance that will disrupt the knowledge translation of an initiative from one institution to another?

The Student as a Producer poster from the University of Lincoln clearly articulates the role of the student as the actual producer of research/inquiry and stresses the authentic nature of the experience. Schuder's work compares the different experiences of both students and instructional staff at Carroll University, a teaching-intensive, private liberal arts college and the University of Wisconsin-Madison a public, research-intensive state university. Buckley, describes work at Bangor University where the students' and instructors' differing conceptions of research are explored. Buschfeld, Dilger, Lilenthal and Schüller describe the role of the student researcher as a member of group undertaking a research/inquiry initiative. The posters represent initiatives from a wide range of institutional types including: liberal arts, research intensive, teaching intensive and comprehensive. When examining policies and practices one should consider if the examples would transfer to your own institution from a perception perspective. Are there any perception hurdles that would need to be overcome?

*Sustainability:*

Five questions about sustainability that should be considered in comparing institutional policies and practices for undergraduate research/inquiry include:

1. Is there an institutional champion? Who will continue to champion the initiative?
2. Does the initiative have sufficient capacity to be sustained (e.g., number of students impacted; depth of impact)?
3. What is the institutional commitment to ongoing funding as opposed to one time funding?
4. Is the initiative driven from an innovation desire?
5. How will success of the initiative be measured? What will constitute success?

The poster prepared by Edwards-Jones and Gresty from the University of Plymouth describes a series of barriers that they have encountered with the publishing of student research/inquiry work in an e-journal. These barriers, all issues of sustainability include: funding, hosting company requirements and the need for a team of staff. Lyden and Campbell describe a whole institution impacted at varying levels of depth. The whole institution impact is contrasted by the scenario presented on Madsen's poster that highlights the very deep learning experiences of an elite, small group of undergraduate students on the IceCube Collaboration. Gregerman and Mosi-Locks describe undergraduate research at the University of Michigan as a 'comprehensive retention strategy'. This approach clarifies both the institutional commitment and the measures of success (i.e., enhanced retention). Sanders work from the University of Sunderland explores an additional series of questions about sustainability including: how to educate instructional staff; how to communicate the message and how to value the student role.

*Summary:*

The use of a series of questions that are grouped in to three sections: inception, institutional culture and sustainability provide the reader with a guide to use when reviewing the institutional posters. This guide is simply one pathway, there are many pathways that can be explored when reviewing the wealth of great ideas within the posters.