

Editorial

Undergraduate Research as a High Impact Practice in Higher Education

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Abstract: Higher education research indicates that student engagement is the most critical factor in retention programs for undergraduate students (Upcraft, Gardner and Barefoot, 2005; Tinto, 2012; Pascarella, Seifert, and Whitt, 2008). These studies illustrate that if students do not feel engaged, they are at high risk for leaving their institution prematurely. Among high impact practices, undergraduate research has been shown to have the most positive effects with regard to promoting student engagement (Kuh, 2018; Kuh, 2008). Herein we highlight the use of mentored research as a high impact practice in undergraduate education, Further, we call upon the education community to share their models, approaches, observations, and research findings related to undergraduate research initiatives.

Keywords: undergraduate research; student engagement; higher education; high impact practices

1. Introduction

Student engagement has been repeatedly underscored as an essential element in undergraduate retention initiatives [1–3]. Specifically, if students do not feel engaged, there is a greater chance that they may precipitately leave their institution. Mentored research is considered to be a high impact practice and imparts the most positive outcomes among such practices that emphasize the engagement of undergraduates [4,5].

2. Discussion

Undergraduate research provides students with practical problem-solving skills [6–8]. The interplay between theory, provided through formal training in the classroom, and practice, offered through mentored research experiences, enhances both student learning and students' early definition of career goals [6]. With undergraduate research, the students' direct exposure and response to real-world problems and reflection upon the outcomes of their actions serve as means for the development and evolution of knowledge related to their subjects of interest [9]. Undergraduate research is particularly suitable for bridging difficult subjects across multiple disciplines [9,10]. The importance of faculty mentor contact for students, within a context of active student engagement through tasks that require strategies such as research, is being increasingly emphasized in models for student engagement and retention [2]. Thus, we call upon the community of higher education researchers to share their views, experiences, and findings related to undergraduate research in this

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