

Stories of Impact: The Transformative Power of Undergraduate Research

Introduction

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We, along with being guest editors of this issue, are also active researchers in our respective disciplines and the scholarship of teaching and learning. We integrate undergraduate research (UGR) as High Impact Practice (HIP) in most of our research projects, and have personal experiences in which we see all the benefits come to life that have been outlined in the series of papers in this issue. As we read abstracts and considered the organization and content for this issue, we began to notice a pattern in some of the abstracts that aligned with our own work and discussions with colleagues, but is generally not present in a traditional scholarly article. That element is the personal narrative account of impact. We know from the extensive literature cited throughout this issue, as well as the work in this section, that providing high-quality undergraduate research projects has substantial impacts at many levels – for individual students, for cohorts, for departments, colleges, universities, and even systems. We, as scholars, see these impacts every day in our own work and the work of others. However, it is not often captured in peer-reviewed research outside of quotes to support evidence of assessment results (which of course, have their own important place in this work).

We wanted to provide a slightly different arena in which authors could describe and discuss the impact of their work or experience. The result is this section on “Stories of Impact.” What you will find in this section is a deviation from the traditional empirical research article, but one we hope you find valuable in a slightly different way. As researchers we can sometimes forget the real, human effects that our work has and we are often not privy to some of those effects that happen later in time or at other levels in our system. In this section you will read a number of articles that discuss impact of some type. You will see a progression of stories, beginning with a narrative account completely from a student-turned-faculty voice on the impact of his first UGR experience and how it continues to impact his work as a professor, and ending with an account of several faculty members who draw more heavily from the literature on creativity and arts education.

These articles represent anecdotal accounts at particular institutions with their own unique contexts, but they highlight benefits many have experienced as individual teacher/scholars and across our own campuses. They humanize the very real impact on so many dimensions of student development and make engagement in UGR seem approachable and more navigable than perhaps faculty new to these pedagogical practices may assume it to be. We hope readers enjoy these narrative accounts as much as we have, and that they inspire new inquiries into UGR that some have never considered before.