

**State of Undergraduate Research at Murray State University,  
MSU's Benchmark Schools, Other Kentucky Universities,  
and Other Select Institutions**

Recently, the Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity (URSA) Advisory Board met to discuss the results of the Faculty Survey conducted during spring 2008. The survey was conducted to better identify the types and extent of undergraduate engagement in research activities at Murray State University (MSU). The online survey found that a majority of respondents reported that the undergraduate research experience was engaging for the students as well as the faculty.

- The survey had one hundred and sixteen (116) faculty respondents and was representative of a wide variety of academic departments and programs.
- The survey found that an overwhelming majority of respondents (85%) have, currently are, or intend to work with undergraduate students in research or scholarly endeavors. The types of projects varied with thirty-seven (37) percent being initiated from course assignments, thirty-four (34) percent beginning as student-driven projects outside the traditional classroom, and the remainder originating from funded and un-funded faculty projects.
- Forty-eight (48) percent of faculty respondents indicated a sense of personal satisfaction as being the greatest perceived benefit of these types of activities. Gaining new perspectives and the ability to accomplish more came in second behind personal satisfaction.
- Beyond perceived benefits, concrete outcomes reported by the faculty include sixty-three (63) percent stating they encouraged their students to present their work and/or fifty-one (51) percent to publish. Twenty-two (22) percent reported having co-presented and/or co-published with their undergraduate students, a trend which appears to be growing nationally.
- Impediments to undergraduate research and scholarly activity do exist across academic disciplines. The current 4/4 teaching load at MSU received a thirty-one (31) percent response rate and was the highest ranked impediment. Student readiness (16%) and lack of financial support (16%) were also ranked.
- Although a lack of financial support was ranked as an impediment by respondents, eighty-one (81) percent of all respondents said they were aware of URSA funding opportunities and seventy-nine (79) percent are aware of funding for faculty activities provided either by the Committee on Institutional Studies and Research (CISR) or by their department/college.

While faculty respondents overwhelmingly rate the experience of working on research or scholarly work with their students positively, seventeen (17) percent of respondents reported a negative experience or failure in their undergraduate research projects. Despite the impediments and challenges, faculty indicated they expect to continue engaging undergraduate students in scholarly activity at the same level or higher.

Following discussion on the Faculty Survey, the URSA Advisory Board reviewed a comparison of URSA program offerings against MSU's benchmark institutions as

defined by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE), other public institutions of higher education in Kentucky, and select other schools in our region. The study compared the following program/initiatives: 1) awards recognizing outstanding undergraduate research, 2) centralized undergraduate research office, 3) membership in the Council on Undergraduate Research, 4) inclusion of undergraduate research activities in faculty promotion and tenure guidelines, 5) university-wide fellowship program, 6) university-wide grant program, 7) *Posters-at-the-Capitol* type program, 8) presentation opportunity on campus (comparable to *Scholars Week*), and 9) the publishing of an undergraduate research, multi-disciplinary journal (*Chrysalis*).

The comparison found that **MSU continues to be a leader in the field of undergraduate research among our benchmark institutions** with the closest comparison coming with Oakland University, a doctoral/research institution. The study found that, on average, our benchmark schools only had programs in three of the nine categories, where MSU has activities in six of the nine. **The comparison found much different results among Kentucky's public institutions with offerings similar to those found at MSU** (six categories) at Morehead State University, Northern Kentucky University, University of Kentucky and University of Louisville. Western Kentucky University compared well in five of the categories. Among other select institutions in the region, Middle Tennessee State University and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale compared well in six of the categories.

The comparison found a growing number of institutions are beginning to incorporate language on mentoring undergraduate and graduate students on research and scholarly activity into their faculty promotion, tenure, and merit pay guidelines. The URSA Advisory Board discussed this and looked at examples of how other institutions have done this in a way that would not require faculty to mentor students, but provide a means for them to receive credit and/or recognition during the promotion and tenure process and merit pay evaluations for having done it. The Board took the position that this would be helpful to MSU faculty and selected Dr. Z.B. Smetana to submit a recommendation on behalf of the Board to the Faculty Senate to study this matter.

The URSA Advisory Board discussed a collaborative idea between URSA and the University Honors Program regarding the Presidential Scholarship Program. The Board decided to move forward and submit a recommendation to President Dunn, in collaboration with the Honors Program, asking that the work assignment associated with the Presidential Scholarship program be modified to involve research, scholarly or creative work.

In other business, the URSA Advisory Board welcomed new member Ms. Julie Robinson as the representative of the University Library. A suggestion was made that URSA play a role in Honor's Day festivities and Specialist Jody Cofer was assigned to look into that matter. The Board also acted to require all funding proposals be submitted through SafeAssign software to check for plagiarism to ensure compliance with the University's "Policy on Academic Honesty."

**A copy of the findings from the Faculty Survey on URSA can be found [online](#).** Questions and/or comments regarding the survey should be submitted to the URSA Survey Project Chair [Dr. Tracey Wortham](#), Associate Professor of Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Other inquiries regarding URSA programs can be submitted to URSA Director [John Mateja](#) or Specialist [Jody Cofer](#).