

**Office of Undergraduate Research
Program Review Site Visit
Dean's Response
Academic Year: 2017-18**

Submitted by:
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Introduction

This program review of the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) is the first for the program since its inception in 2004. The OUR director and staff prepared and facilitated a thoughtful self-study, Program Review Evaluation Team site visit and report, and a realistic response to the Evaluation Team site visit report with next steps clearly articulated. The self-study was thorough and included relevant descriptions and data over time on programs, services, learning outcomes, structure and budget. It is clear that OUR serves mostly students but is mindful of the faculty engagement required to make this office successful. The self-study document, along with interviews during the site visit on May 7, 2018 provided solid background material for the Site Visit Team.

The Program Review Evaluation Team was exceptional with several national experts in undergraduate research represented. The team is well versed in the significance of undergraduate research as a high impact practice and the positive benefits it has for marginalized groups. The Evaluation Team's careful review of the OUR program was informed by feedback from the Weber State University community of faculty, staff, students and administrators, as well as the experiences of the review team members themselves. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis was conducted to inform a set of seven official recommendations about how to better support students, faculty mentors and the program itself. The commendations recognize the long-term consistency in leadership of OUR, the commitment of the administration and faculty to undergraduate research and the benefits of situating OUR with other high impact programs at the university.

Both commendations and recommendations made by the Site Review Team and the OUR program's response to them are addressed below.

Site Visit Team Commendations

The Site Visit Review Team's commendations for the OUR program are consistent with my own observations of OUR. There is clear alignment between the mission of OUR and the university's mission and emphasis on student success. The Site Review Team noted the seasoned leadership of OUR and the long history WSU has with the national Council for Undergraduate Research (CUR). Two new initiatives (Research Scholars Program and Integrating Research into the Curriculum) were also noted as innovative and putting WSU ahead of the pack nationally. Resources dedicated to funding student research and the addition of a development officer assigned to OUR to help raise more funding for student

research was given high praise. OUR's track record of hosting campus, statewide and national undergraduate research conferences was also noted as strength. The dedication and commitment of upper administration and faculty in supporting students' research and student learning was also noteworthy to the Site Review Team. These commendations are well deserved.

Site Visit Team Recommendations and Program Response

The recommendations from the Site Visit Team were well-informed and very helpful for moving the Office of Undergraduate Research forward. The team made recommendations (briefly summarized below) to address the following challenges identified in their report:

- Small number of faculty buying into programs
- Maybe too much budget-stability limits size of programs
- Lack of growth in programs
- Celebration day steady state
- Lack of training of mentors
- Some faculty equate OUR to money only
- Total number of students doing research is unknown
- Lack of overall advisory group
- Determine value added to WSU by undergraduate research
- There is not a great deal of incentive for faculty to do undergraduate research
- Not all students have the opportunity to earn academic credit for UGR

Recommendation #1: Workshops and opportunities for student development.

The Site Visit Team recommends that the OUR take steps to provide workshops and trainings for students to aid in their professional development as undergraduate researchers and scholars. OUR has offered some training opportunities but is committed to getting feedback from past students to inform the development of more trainings for students.

Recommendation #2: Create a faculty community and offer mentor development opportunities.

The Site Visit Team recommends that the OUR encourage a faculty community of mentors and develop training for interested faculty. OUR noted in their response to the Site Review Team report that they currently do provide professional development activities and resources for faculty mentors. Although I agree that some mentor development opportunities are being offered, I would encourage OUR to work with the Teaching and Learning Forum (TLF) to develop a Community of Practice for faculty interested in undergraduate research. This is a good way to leverage an existing structure to provide more support to faculty mentors.

Recommendation #3: Create an Advisory Board

The Site Visit team recommends creating an advisory board. Perhaps a better recommendation would be to better utilize the advisory board that was created in the 2016-2017 academic year and only met few times. OUR's outlined action steps to brainstorm advisory board members to help reinvigorate this body are good. Setting up a

schedule of regular meetings is also good. I would encourage OUR to talk with other high impact programs with advisory boards to help determine the purpose and function of the OUR advisory board before inviting new members to it.

Recommendation #4: Celebration Day

The Site Visit Team recommends that the Undergraduate Research Symposium and Celebration should be examined to develop strategies to increase student participation. OUR is taking a systematic and data driven approach to reimagining this celebration and plans to utilize their reinvigorated advisory board in the process. The only other thing I would encourage OUR to do is to consider combining the OUR Symposium with celebrations of other high impact educational experiences. I think this would create an opportunity to increase participation, foot traffic to the event and tax the time of our campus community less.

Recommendations #5&6: Student Grant Program/Documenting Outcomes from Recipients

The Site Visit Team recommends OUR track the success of students participating in grant programs to better understand the demographics and outcomes of undergraduate research students. OUR notes that they are currently doing this but will add additional measures of student success. I believe that OUR will make the most headway on this recommendation with the creation of a High Impact Educational Experience (HIEE) dashboard where OUR data can be accessed via a specific HIEE filter. This dashboard would contain data regarding broader student success indicators, like retention and completion of students, for each HIEE at WSU.

Recommendation #7: Curriculum Initiatives

The Site Visit Team commended OUR for working with departments and programs to move towards a research-rich curriculum and encouraged them to continue to pursue this work. OUR is committed to doing so. I strongly encourage OUR to have an undergraduate research course designation proposed and accepted by Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee by end of Spring 2020. This designation will help students identify where they will find undergraduate research opportunities throughout the curriculum, it will help faculty demonstrate in the rank and tenure files just how much undergraduate research they are currently facilitating and it will help OUR get a more accurate picture of undergraduate research at WSU.

Additional Recommendations Included in the Site Visit Team Report but Not Listed in the Official List of Recommendations

Embedded within some of the observations in the “Weaknesses” area of the report were several other recommendations for OUR that were noteworthy even though they did not appear on the official list of recommendations. These include:

Recommendation #8: OUR Staff/Physical Space

The Site Visit Team recommended that OUR has grown to a point where an Assistant Director position is needed and there is not enough physical space for all staff to work in the office. This is an accurate observation on the part of the review team and is a concern I also share. The OUR director, John Cavitt, and I have been in several conversations about

both the need for an assistant director and the need for more space. Most programs on campus have similar staffing and space challenges. We are working through solutions but these won't be immediate.

Recommendation #9: Budget and program growth

The Site Visit Team noted that the OUR budget has remained stagnant over the last several years. This impacts the ability of OUR to grow programs and offer new opportunities for students and faculty. I concur with this observation as well. It will be imperative that OUR collect data through the undergraduate research designation on courses to help make the case for additional funding. Having more accurate data about the full scope of undergraduate research activity at WSU will help inform budget discussions in the future.

Conclusion

Overall, the Site Visit Review Team's report affirms that OUR is on the right track but may be showing signs of stagnation in terms of participation on the part of students and faculty. The encouragement to pay attention to documenting program growth is critical for increasing staffing and funding to the program. The focus on integrating undergraduate research into the curriculum is an excellent way to help more students benefit from undergraduate research as a high impact practice *and* expand the scope of support OUR provides to students and faculty at WSU. The Site Visit Review Team report and OUR's response to it seem completely appropriate. This process has been a good opportunity for OUR to reflect on its long-standing impressive presence and impact at WSU. By leveraging existing strengths and making some of the changes recommended by the Site Visit Review Team, I think OUR will successfully grow and be appropriately resourced.