SSRP Assessment 2016

The Summer Student Research Program (SSRP) is a UNK activity that gives undergraduate students opportunities to conduct original research, scholarship, and creative activity in a multi-disciplinary setting. It is open to projects from all academic areas.

Program Format and Goals
In 2016, nineteen students spent about 10 weeks in the summer designing and conducting their projects, and writing papers reporting on their results.

The key characteristics of the program are:

- One-on-one collaboration with a faculty expert
- Design, conduct, and dissemination of original scholarly projects
- Exposure to research and scholarship in a broad range of disciplines
- Work within a supportive, challenging, and engaging community of scholars

The multi-disciplinary theme provides an opportunity for student-scholars to recall their general studies education and reinforce the integrated nature of knowledge and learning. In some cases this comes through weekly discussion groups, and in others students have been known to cross disciplinary lines and help each other on projects.

Upon completion of the project, students disseminate their results in three forms:

1. Scholarly paper
2. Conference poster presenting their results
3. Oral presentation at a Fall Symposium

The goals include fostering:

- Independent, applied learning experiences
- Integration of knowledge from general studies and field of study
- Critical thinking and dissemination skills
- Understanding and experience in scholarly activity

Outcomes
One week after their oral presentations in the fall, students were asked to complete an online exit survey. Eighteen of the nineteen students responded.

Recruiting
- Students learned about the program primarily from two sources: Faculty (61%), and other students (27%). This is consistent with previous data.
- The strongest reason for applying was “to prepare for graduate or professional school” (55%). The second most important reason was “to learn more about
research” (22%). This is a change from previous years, when “To enhance my resume” was the most popular response.

**Effort, Independence, and Mentoring**

- 16% of students spent 21 or more hours per week on their projects. 44% spent 11 to 20 hours per week. 23% reported working 6 – 10 hours per week.
- 87% of students met with their mentors once a week or more. 11% met with their mentors 2-3 times a month.
- 94% said they had a lot of independence in project management, 1 person said their mentor controlled the project more than they wanted. No students indicated that they did not get enough guidance from their mentor.
- Most students had to develop a workplan (94%), had to direct their own work (89%), and solve unexpected problems (89%).
- 27% had to manage their project funds.
- 93% of students report that they feel more comfortable working with faculty now.

**Reflective Learning**

- 46% of the 2016 students kept journals throughout the summer, and of those:
  - 22% (n=2) shared their journals with their mentors
  - 44% (n=4) said journaling affected the planning of their work
  - 100% (n=9) said journaling helped in writing their paper and preparing their oral presentation.
- 64% of students discussed their work with faculty members who were not their mentors during the summer.

**Application of Coursework**

- In conducting projects:
  - 94% said they applied knowledge from courses in their major
  - 64% applied knowledge from general studies courses
- 94% say they developed a better understanding of what they have learned in coursework.
- 86% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more about current issues in their academic field.
- 82% developed a greater understanding of other disciplines.
Enriching Educational Goals

- 81% said that participation in SSRP supports their career plans, and 35% changed post-graduation plans because of their summer experience.

- 87% of students plan to go to graduate school or professional school after graduation. 66% of students planning on professional school indicate they will go to an in-state institution, and 58% of those going to graduate school plan to go to an in-state institution.

- 81% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the program improved their writing skills.

- 93% said they improved their critical thinking skills.

- 93% agree or strongly agreed with the statement that participation in the program benefited their undergraduate education. One person strongly disagreed.

- 82% said the overall experience was "wonderful," and 17% said it was “good.”

We had two open-ended questions at the end: What were the best and worst aspects of the program?

The positive comments this year focused on the academic values of the program, such as:

“I think that it helped me so much academically. I can't even explain how much better I am doing in my class work because of everything I did this summer.”

“Proving to myself that I can do research that is meaningful that applies to my area of study.”

“Being pushed outside of my comfort zone to give presentations and write a very formal and professional article.”

Other comments followed a familiar pattern of appreciation for the relationship formed with their faculty mentor:

“The opportunity to enhance my knowledge on the topic that I was most interested in as well as working closely with faculty.”

“I loved working with my mentor. I learned so much from them and have developed a great relationship that has expanded in other areas of my undergraduate program. They have given me so many skills that I will continue to refine as I continue in my professional and personal life.”

Typically, negative comments focus on the weekly meetings. Students are looking for connections to their specific research projects but the meetings are targeting broader development issues. We had two such comments this year. We also had two comments
from students who wanted more time to work on their research. One student expressed frustration about poor communication from the SSRP staff.

Inquiries regarding the SSRP can be directed to John Falconer in UNK’s Office of Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity. Tel 865.8702.