

URF Assessment 2016

The Undergraduate Research Fellows program (URF) is a UNK activity that gives undergraduate students opportunities to conduct original research, scholarship, and creative activity during the academic year. It is open to projects from all academic areas.

Program Format and Goals

In 2016, 133 students worked with faculty to develop and conduct scholarly projects. Students are paid \$500 per semester (\$1,000 for a full year).

The key characteristics of the program are:

- One-on-one collaboration with a faculty expert
- Design, conduct, and dissemination of original scholarly projects
- Training in research ethics

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

At the end of the spring semester, students were asked to complete an on-line exit survey. 55 students completed surveys.

Recruiting

- Students learned about the program from two sources: Faculty (84%), and other students (9%).
- The strongest reason for applying was “to enhance my resume” (31%). The second most important reason was “to strengthen graduate schools applications” (22%), followed by “to learn more about research” (17%).

Effort, Independence, and Mentoring

- 47% of students spent 1 - 4 hours per week on their projects, and 45% spend 5 - 10 hours per week. 5% spent 10 - 15 hours per week.
- 82% of students met with their mentors once a week or more. 11% met with their mentors 2-3 times a month.
- 93% said they had a lot of independence in project management, and 4% said their mentor controlled the project more than they wanted. 4% of students indicated that they did not get enough guidance from their mentor.

- Most students had to develop a workplan (85%), had to direct their own work (73%), and solve unexpected problems (80%).
- 20% had to manage their project funds.
- 46% of students report that they feel more comfortable working with faculty now.

Reflective Learning

- 35% of the 2016 students kept journals, and of those:
 - 58% shared their journals with their mentors
 - 47% said journaling affected the planning of their work
 - 95% said journaling helped in writing papers and preparing presentations.
- 75% of students discussed their work with faculty members who were not their mentors during the summer.

Application of Coursework

- In conducting projects:
 - 96% said they applied knowledge from courses in their major
 - 64% applied knowledge from general studies courses
- 70% say they developed a better understanding of what they have learned in coursework.
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more about current issues in their academic field.
- 81% developed a greater understanding of other disciplines.

Enriching Educational Goals

- 84% said that participation in URF supports their career plans.
- 66% of students plan to go to graduate school or professional school after graduation. 79% of students planning on professional school indicate they will go to an out of state institution, and 56% of those going to graduate school plan to go to an out of state institution.
- 41% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the program improved their writing skills.
- 51% said they improved their critical thinking skills.
- 98% agree or strongly agreed with the statement that participation in the program benefited their undergraduate education. One person strongly disagreed.

- 56% said the overall experience was "wonderful," and 39% 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 working closely with faculty, and learning to do research in their field of study. Students also commented on the sense of accomplishment they felt at the end of the year. Comments like this were typical: "Building relationships with faculty and further investigating an important issue in my academic field." Another student wrote "The exposure and experience with professionals in my future career was so crucial. It built my confidence and critical thinking."

The most common response to the question "What was the worst thing about the program" was "Nothing." Second came concerns about not having enough time to work on the project, or the project demanding too much time.

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