

## SSRP Assessment 2018

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 2018, twenty 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 on-line exit survey. Fourteen of the twenty students responded.

### *Recruiting*

- Students learned about the program primarily from two sources: Faculty (86%), and other students (14%). This is consistent with previous data.
- Three reasons were most important in the decision to apply: To learn more about research, to enhance the student's resume, and to prepare for graduate or professional school.

*Effort, Independence, and Mentoring*

- 50% of students spent 6 to 10 hours per week on their projects. 35% spent 11 to 20 hours per week. This is a slightly lower average than normal.
- 100% of students met with their mentors once a week or more, which is higher than normal but also the program goal. 36% met with their mentors several times a week.
- 92% said they had a lot of independence in project management. One student indicated that they did not get enough guidance from their mentor, but no one indicated that their mentor controlled the project too much.
- Most students had to develop a workplan (78%), had to direct their own work (92%), and solve unexpected problems (86%).
- 28% had to manage their project funds.
- 92% of students report that they feel more comfortable working with faculty now.

*Reflective Learning*

- 28% of the 2018 students kept journals throughout the summer, and of those:
  - 15% shared their journals with their mentors
  - 0% said journaling affected the planning of their work
  - 100% said journaling helped in writing their paper and preparing their oral presentation.
- 40% of students discussed their work with faculty members who were not their mentors during the summer. This is typically over 60%.

*Application of Coursework*

- In conducting projects:
  - 93% said they applied knowledge from courses in their major
  - 28% applied knowledge from general studies courses
- 78% say they developed a better understanding of what they have learned in coursework.
- 71% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned more about current issues in their academic field. This number is typically at least 80%, and often over 90%.
- 57% developed a greater understanding of other disciplines.

*Enriching Educational Goals*

- 78% said that participation in SSRP supports their career plans, and 7% changed post-graduation plans because of their summer experience.
- 78% of students plan to go to graduate school or professional school after graduation (a number lower than is typical). 67% of students planning on professional school indicate they will go to an in-state institution, and 50% of those going to graduate school plan to go to an out-of-state institution.
- 85% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the program improved their writing skills.
- 100% said they improved their critical thinking skills. This is about 20 points higher than normal.
- 100% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that participation in the program benefited their undergraduate education.
- 57% said the overall experience was "wonderful," and 35% said it was "good." Typical results are more than 80% calling the experience wonderful, and 15-18% calling it 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 scholarly community within the program, such as:

“Working on an independent project; working with a diverse group of students.”

“Getting to network with faculty, meet other students, and become more comfortable exploring research projects in the future.”

Typically, negative comments focus on the weekly meetings. This year, a student wrote

“So you said people would tell you the trips were pointless, and I’m here to say they’re wrong. I can’t say the trip in any way improved my research, but I had some great conversations with some great faculty and enjoyed hanging out with some people I otherwise probably wouldn’t have ever talked to.”

Other than that, the major theme this year was the stress of having to complete the project within time constraints.

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