

2013

The Power of Undergraduate Research

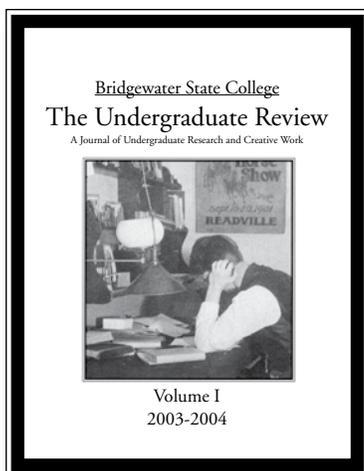
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Inaugural Volume

The Power of Undergraduate Research

Undergraduate research has truly come to prominence across the country—and in many other parts of the world—as university administrators and faculty recognize the efficacy of this “high-impact practice.” George Kuh (2008) famously identified several “high-impact practices,” which data from myriad institutions of higher education have shown to make significant positive differences in the lives of students. Along with attesting to tremendous benefits provided by undergraduate-research opportunities, Kuh highlighted the advantages accorded to students who study abroad, participate in internships and service learning, live in a residence-hall “Living and Learning Community,” and take writing-intensive courses across the curriculum, among other practices.

To me, the most compelling evidence of Bridgewater State University’s excellence in serving its students is its major investments in *every one* of the high-impact practices. In an address to the American Association of Colleges and Universities this year, Kuh spoke of the forthcoming publication of long-term data on high-impact practices: what he and his colleagues have found by following up with college graduates many years after graduation. Their results show that high-impact practices not only correlate with success and satisfaction during the undergraduate experience (higher GPAs, more timely graduation rates, greater engagement in learning, etc.), but they are still benefiting graduates after their tenth- and twentieth-year reunions. In advancing opportunities such as Adrian Tinsley Program undergraduate-research grants, Study Tours, internships, and other high-impact practices, BSU is ensuring students’ success today as well as long after their graduation.

Kuh’s and others’ research on high-impact practices quantifies what we have witnessed in inspiring example after inspiring example here at Bridgewater. Spring is the season of graduate-school acceptance letters, which makes working in the Office of Undergraduate Research especially gratifying at this time of year, as students drop by to tell us they earned a spot in their first-choice program, often with full funding. They want us to know that their undergraduate research experience, presenting their work at national conferences, and even publishing in this very journal, were noted with enthusiasm by graduate admissions committees. In the weeks leading up to May commencement we hear the stories of students who found their passion for an area of study and future career when they were invited by a faculty mentor to join a lab group or apply for an ATP grant to fund their creative writing. And Spring is also when we send this journal of student research and creative work to the publisher, filled with admiration and delight for the “high impact” these undergraduate-research projects now make on us. Congratulations on your fine work. Many thanks for sharing it with us.

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Director of Undergraduate Research

Reference

Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

See Astin, 1997; Brownell & Swaner, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2008.