ABSTRACT

TITLE: Fostering Intellectual Curiosity through Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities

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Undergraduate research has been identified as a high-impact practice to improve student success, learning, and retention (Kuh, 2008). George Mason University’s Students as Scholars initiative engages in extensive faculty and curriculum development across disciplines to build a culture of inquiry and authentic scholarship for undergraduates. Through our program and learning outcomes assessment, we have learned that curiosity is a primary motivator for students’ decision to participate in undergraduate research, and it seems to drive them to continue their inquiry beyond college. Our paper asks: What role does curiosity play in the motivation to participate and persist in undergraduate research? How can the university create an environment that nurtures and rewards curiosity? We operate with the assumption that curiosity is both innate and can be nurtured from the individual’s environment; we believe that nurturing this curiosity is an essential role and key responsibility of the university. While undergraduate research is typically considered to be a primarily academic pursuit, there is great potential in academic-student affairs collaborations for fostering intellectual curiosity both in and outside of the classroom, and that these intentional partnerships can create “seamless learning environments” to support positive student development. This paper uses existing survey research and interviews with students to understand how curiosity drives students to do undergraduate research, and proposes collaborative solutions for student development in this arena.