



ASSESSMENT REPORT

ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT SURVEY ON STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP

JULY 2014

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**OFFICE OF STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP, CREATIVE ACTIVITIES, & RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT SURVEY ON STUDENT SCHOLARSHIP
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Background

The OSCAR Department Survey was developed by the Office of Institutional Assessment and the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, & Research (OSCAR) in spring 2012. It was adapted from a previous survey that was administered in spring 2010. The current survey was revised for 2014; the current items reflect the evolving programmatic and formative assessment needs of OSCAR.

The primary goals of the survey were to determine the extent to which academic units are engaged with the goals and activities of the *Students as Scholars* initiative; to ascertain general faculty attitudes and practices regarding undergraduate research and creative activities; and to learn how information about *Students as Scholars* and related activities is being shared with students and faculty at Mason. See Appendix A for the instrument.

The OSCAR Department Survey was administered in late April 2014, to all chairs and directors of academic departments and interdisciplinary programs at Mason that offered undergraduate degree programs as of spring 2014. A department-specific link to the online survey was sent to each chair or director, who was instructed to either complete the survey or forward the link to a designated respondent (such as the coordinator of the undergraduate program). Of the 48 academic units targeted, 45 completed the survey for a response rate of 94%. The Honors College and Department of Nutrition and Food Studies currently do not have degree programs but serve undergraduates, and were also asked to participate, for a total of 47 participating units. See Table 6 in Appendix B for this list.

Data Analysis and Results

Data were aggregated and frequencies were reported for each survey item. The survey did not require individuals to respond to every item; however, most respondents completed all items. Percentages for each item are listed with the corresponding frequency in parentheses. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Beliefs About the Current Culture and Practices Regarding Undergraduate Scholarship in the Department

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement on four items relating to their unit's culture and practices regarding undergraduate scholarship (see Table 1). Most (91%) "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that providing opportunities for undergraduates is a priority for their faculty, and all but one respondent believed that their upper-division students could do scholarly activities if given the opportunity. This is an improvement over the 2012 survey, when 85% of chairs responded this way. Although supervising undergraduate scholarship is stated as a criterion for annual faculty review in only 30% of responding departments, 67% reported that faculty are actually rewarded for supervising undergraduate scholarship in promotion and tenure or annual review. This finding is up from 56% in 2012.

It should be noted that some of the academic units targeted for this survey are interdisciplinary degree programs, and their faculty are evaluated in their various home units. Thus, the directors of these programs may have been unable to respond to the items about faculty review; however, this issue is reflected in only two of the five "don't know" responses for each of these items (see Table 1). Faculty review and promotion and tenure are issues that OSCAR and *Students as Scholars* may wish to further investigate with individual academic units.

Table 1. Participant Beliefs About the Current Culture and Practices Regarding Undergraduate Scholarship in the Department

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Providing opportunities for undergraduate scholarship is a priority in my department (n=47)	51% (24)	40% (19)	8% (4)	0	0
The activity of supervising undergraduate scholarship is stated as a criterion in my department's yearly faculty review (n=46)	11% (5)	20% (9)	54% (25)	4% (2)	11% (5)
The activity of supervising undergraduate scholarship counts positively towards faculty promotion and tenure in my department (n=46)	17% (8)	50% (23)	22% (10)	0	11% (5)
Upper-division students in my department are able to perform scholarly activities if given the opportunity (n=47)	45% (21)	53% (25)	0	0	2% (1)

Frequencies are noted in parentheses; percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding

Students as Scholars Program Outcomes

Participants were asked to report on how their department “fits” or identifies with the *Students as Scholars* program outcomes (see Table 2). Overall, most responded positively, reporting that their department fits at least “somewhat” with the outcomes. Respondents were the most likely to report that their undergraduate students who have participated in student scholarship are prepared for the future (87% “completely” or “mostly”), which was an increase from the 2012 survey, when 68% reported the same. It seems that students now have more opportunities to communicate the results of their research or creative activities (68%) than they did in 2012 (52%). Respondents were the least sure about the pervasiveness of student scholarship in their departments, with 40% responding “completely” or “mostly,” a finding that is consistent with the 2012 survey.

Table 2. Department Views on *Students as Scholars* Program Outcomes

Item	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	Not at all	Not sure
Student scholarship is pervasive in my department	17% (8)	23% (11)	47% (22)	11% (5)	2% (1)
My department's undergraduate degree programs offer opportunities for scholarly inquiry, creative activities and/or research	43% (20)	32% (15)	23% (11)	2% (1)	0
My department's faculty support undergraduate students in scholarly inquiry, creative activities and/or research	47% (22)	32% (15)	21% (10)	0	0
My department's undergraduate students participate in scholarship, creative activities and/or research	30% (14)	26% (12)	40% (19)	2% (1)	2% (1)
My department's undergraduate students have opportunities to communicate the results of their research or creative activities	43% (20)	26% (12)	28% (13)	2% (1)	2% (1)
My department's undergraduate students who have participated in student scholarship are prepared for their career goal and/or advanced study	38% (18)	49% (23)	6% (3)	2% (1)	4% (2)

Frequencies are noted in parentheses; percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding (n=47 for all items)

Sharing Information About Student Scholarship

The survey asked respondents to report how their departments share information about opportunities for student scholarship with students and faculty. Respondents were instructed to select all options that applied to their experience (see Table 3). In terms of sharing information with students, the most common response was faculty talking about their own scholarly activity (87%) or other undergraduates who are involved in scholarship (68%) in their classes, followed by the department sharing information through an email listserv (68%), or formal department events (55%). “Other” comments included faculty-student recruiting; OSCAR staff making presentations to classes; and electronic communication through email, blogs, and the Blackboard system.

Table 3. How the Department Shares Opportunities for Student Scholarship with **Students**

Item	%
Faculty talk about their scholarly activities in classes	87%
Faculty talk about other undergraduates who are involved in scholarship in classes	68%
The department holds symposia, seminars, brown bag events, or lecture series to expose undergraduates to research or creative opportunities	55%
The department forwards information to students through email listserv	68%
The department posts information on Facebook or Twitter	34%
The department’s website links to the <i>Students as Scholars</i> page	30%
Students share information with each other through student organizations or activities	47%
Other	13%

Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select “all that apply” (n=47)

In terms of sharing information about *Students as Scholars* activities with faculty, department chairs reported forwarding emails (81%), informal conversations with colleagues (81%), and discussions in department meetings (70%) as the most common means of communication (see Table 4).

Table 4. How the Department Shares Information with **Faculty** About *Students as Scholars* Activities

Item	%
Forwarded emails from deans, department chairs, or undergraduate coordinators	81%
Discussed in department meetings	70%
Attended <i>Students as Scholars</i> workshops or information sessions	45%
Through informal conversations with colleagues	81%
Other	2%

Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select “all that apply” (n=47)

Department Plans to Participate in Undergraduate Scholarship

Chairs were asked to report their department-level activities and plans regarding participation in the *Students as Scholars* initiative. One-third (15 units) reported that they had already received an OSCAR Scholarship Development Grant application in the past, and eight departments plan to apply for a grant. The sum of these figures represent almost half of all departments with undergraduate degree programs, thus far exceeding OSCAR’s initial goal of 35% for the first five years of the initiative.

It is good news for OSCAR that 19 departments have already applied for at least one Research and Scholarship Intensive (RS) course for their students, and 12 more departments plan to do so. The finding that 11 departments were “not sure” whether their department would apply for an RS course designation, and another five had no plans to apply may be a concern, as OSCAR’s target is 100% by 2016. See Table 5.

Table 5. Department Plans to Participate in Undergraduate Scholarship

Item	Received	Plan to apply	Have no plans to apply	Not sure
Scholarship Development Grant (SDG)	32% (15)	17% (8)	11% (5)	38% (18)
Research & Scholarship Intensive course (RS)	40% (19)	26% (12)	11% (5)	23% (11)
External funding (e.g. grants, contracts, fellowships, or other sponsored awards) that includes support for undergraduate student scholarship	28% (13)	17% (8)	23% (11)	23% (11)

Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select "all that apply" (n=47)

Comments and Suggestions

Survey respondents were given an opportunity to respond to open-ended items. Most respondents did not enter any text. Comments were analyzed for themes, and are summarized by item below.

What additional suggestions of programs or activities do you have that would help enhance the opportunities for and visibility of undergraduate scholarship in your department?

There were nine responses to this question, six of which focused on the need for funding or other resources to support undergraduate research and creative activities. Resources are needed to support students through grant funding, or through awards for accomplishments that result from their scholarship. One department chair noted that while there is a lot of grant funding in the department, there is not enough to support all of the students who want to participate. One respondent noted that working with undergraduate student researchers requires considerable time and effort, and faculty should be compensated for this work. Two chairs wrote that they do not have enough faculty to provide the number and quality of opportunities that should be available for students in their units.

Three respondents suggested services or resources that OSCAR might be able to provide, including faculty workshops about mentoring undergraduate researchers, and information about opportunities for funding and outlets for publication that are appropriate for undergraduate scholarship in their specific academic fields.

Additional Comments Regarding Student Scholarship

All of the 18 final comments reflected positive attitudes toward undergraduate scholarship and/or OSCAR. Eleven responses referred favorably to the campus-wide opportunities, programs, or events (such as the Celebration of Scholarship) that OSCAR offers. Several also expressed sentiments that mentoring undergraduate scholarship is "an extremely worthwhile activity" for their faculty. Some verbatim examples follow:

- *The OSCAR programs are working well for our department.*
- *Student scholarship is a major part of every course I teach.*
- *Our faculty have attended and mentored student presenters at the end of the year research symposiums held by OSCAR and CHSS. These are great events and are a wonderful way to spotlight the efforts of students while raising interest and awareness about the research process. I hope that these events can continue!*
- *Our department strongly believes in student scholarship; we have a long tradition of valuing and supporting student scholarship.*
- *I love OSCAR. It's the best thing that's happening at GMU right now.*
- *Excellent program. A driving force for undergraduate students to attend Mason.*

Nine responses discussed the desire to expand opportunities and numbers of student participants, either in the department or university-wide. Two respondents noted that they could accomplish more if there were more faculty in the department who could be dedicated to undergraduate research, or if there were resources to support dedicated faculty positions. One chair was unsure of how pervasive inquiry-based teaching methods are across the faculty, but plans to “raise the issue in the fall.” Two chairs wrote that their faculty are committed to undergraduate research, but have been struggling to define the appropriate levels and kinds of engagement for undergraduates in their fields; these struggles reflect either the high level of training and preparation required to conduct research, or the question of what scholarship should entail at the undergraduate level. Four respondents expressed the need for funding to support students and/or faculty in these endeavors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, it appears that undergraduate degree programs at Mason are responding positively to the aims and activities of OSCAR and *Students as Scholars*, and report optimistic faculty attitudes about students’ abilities to create scholarship in their fields. There continues to be concern about how pervasive these attitudes are amongst the faculty, suggesting that there may be small groups of faculty across campus who are committed to undergraduate scholarship, or that some faculties have embraced the practice more than others. Most troubling are those units that have no plans to apply for a Scholarship Development Grant or a Research and Scholarship Intensive course for their students. OSCAR staff should continue to work with units individually to ascertain the specific needs and concerns of the various faculties in regard to the initiative’s goals.

Ideological and pedagogical commitment to undergraduate scholarship is essential to “fostering a culture of student scholarship,” but resources to provide and expand opportunities continue to be a concern. In a time of resource strain at both the institution as well as in the federal agencies, funding for research has become increasingly scarce and competitive. If faculty feel this strain on their projects, it also constrains opportunities for undergraduates as well as graduate students. It is important to acknowledge that disciplinary differences in how scholarship is produced are important determinants of resource needs, as well as how engaged undergraduate students are allowed to be in knowledge production. The results from this survey indicate that, from the chair’s perspective, some faculty are being thoughtful about how to work within their respective environments and provide high quality, discipline-appropriate experiences for their undergraduates. OSCAR and *Students as Scholars* development efforts should be mindful of these various environments, and seek to support their particular needs as applicable.

* <http://oscar.gmu.edu>

APPENDIX A



**Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, & Research (OSCAR)
Department Survey on Student Scholarship**

In 2009, the Mason community adopted a university-wide initiative* to improve student success through increased participation in and celebration of undergraduate research and creative activities. Mason’s *Students as Scholars* initiative is transforming curricula across the disciplines to build a culture of inquiry and authentic scholarship. *Students as Scholars* engages in extensive faculty and curricular development to create courses that meet learning outcomes at three developmental levels: discovery, scholarly inquiry, and creation of scholarship.

Every two years, we ask for information from department chairs about departments that serve undergraduate degree programs. We would appreciate your feedback. The results will be used by the *Students as Scholars* QEP Leadership Council to enhance and improve our programs to provide opportunities for our students and support for our faculty as we promote student scholarship. Please note that the responses to these questions will be kept confidential, although we may contact you for further information about your answers.

Student scholarship is the *process of undergraduates generating and sharing knowledge or creative works*. It includes undergraduate research and creative activities, as conducted within your discipline.

* This initiative is Mason’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), as required by the institution’s accreditation agency, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

1. Please answer the following questions based on the current culture and practices in your department:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don’t Know
a. Providing opportunities for undergraduate scholarship is a priority in my department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. The activity of supervising undergraduate scholarship is stated as a criterion in my department’s yearly faculty review	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. The activity of supervising undergraduate scholarship counts positively towards faculty promotion and tenure in my department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. Upper-division students in my department are able to perform scholarly activities if given the opportunity.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

2. *Students as Scholars* Program Outcomes:

The following outcomes are used to determine Mason's success in fostering a culture of student scholarship. Where do you think your department fits in terms of these outcomes?

	Completely	Mostly	Somewhat	Not at all	Not sure
a. Student scholarship is pervasive in my department	<input type="checkbox"/>				
b. My department's undergraduate degree programs offer opportunities for scholarly inquiry, creative activities and/or research	<input type="checkbox"/>				
c. My department's faculty support undergraduate students in scholarly inquiry, creative activities and/or research	<input type="checkbox"/>				
d. My department's undergraduate students participate in scholarship, creative activities and/or research	<input type="checkbox"/>				
e. My department's undergraduate students have opportunities to communicate the results of their research or creative activities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
f. My department's undergraduate students who have participated in student scholarship are prepared for their career goal and/or advanced study	<input type="checkbox"/>				

3. How does the department share opportunities **with students** about *Students as Scholars* activities? Select all that apply.

- a. Faculty talk about their scholarly activities in classes
- b. Faculty talk about other undergraduates who are involved in scholarship in classes
- c. The department holds symposia, seminars, brown bag events, or lecture series to expose undergraduates to research or creative opportunities
- d. The department forwards information to students through email listserv
- e. The department posts information on Facebook or Twitter
- f. The department's website links to the *Students as Scholars* page
- g. Students share information with each other through student organizations or activities
- h. Other: [text box]

i.

4. How does the department share information **with faculty** about *Students as Scholars* activities? Select all that apply.

- a. Forwarded emails from deans, department chairs, or undergraduate coordinators
- b. Discussed in department meetings
- c. Attended *Students as Scholars* workshops or information sessions
- d. Through informal conversations with colleagues
- e. Other: [text box]

5. Please tell us about your department's plans to participate in undergraduate scholarship. Has your department already received the following:

	Received	Plan to apply	Have no plans to apply	Not sure
a. Scholarship Development Grant (SDG)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. Research & Scholarship Intensive (RS) course	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. External funding (e.g. grants, contracts, fellowships, or other sponsored awards) that includes support for undergraduate student scholarship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. What additional suggestions of programs or activities do you have that would help enhance the opportunities for and visibility of undergraduate scholarship in your department?

Comments:

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments you have regarding student scholarship.

Comments:

APPENDIX B

Table 6. List of Survey Respondents, by College/School

College/School	Department/Unit
Business	Accounting Finance Information Systems & Operations Management Management Marketing
Conflict Analysis & Resolution	Conflict Analysis & Resolution (undergraduate program)
Education & Human Development	Recreation, Health & Tourism (Division of Health and Human Performance) Recreation, Health & Tourism (Division of Recreation, Health & Tourism)
Health and Human Services	Health Administration & Policy Nursing Nutrition and Food Studies Social Work
Honors College	Honors College
Humanities & Social Sciences	Bachelor Individualized Study Communication Criminology, Law, and Society Economics English Global Affairs History Latin American Studies Modern & Classical Languages New Century College Philosophy Psychology Public & International Affairs Religious Studies Russian & Eurasian Studies Sociology & Anthropology
Science	Atmospheric/Oceanic/Earth Science Biology Chemistry and Biochemistry Environmental Science & Policy Forensic Science Geography/Geoinformation Science Mathematics Physics/Astronomy/Computational Data Sciences
Visual & Performing Arts	Computer and Game Design Film & Video Studies School of Art School of Dance School of Music Theatre

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College/School	Department/Unit
Volgenau School of Engineering	Bioengineering Computer Science Electrical & Computer Engineering Systems Engineering & Operations Research
