Undergraduate Education in Kentucky: The Role of Undergraduate Research

John Mateja
URSA/McNair Programs
Murray State University
Kentucky (Past decade)

- Considerable emphasis on:
  - Bringing more students into college
  - Keeping them in college
  - Getting them college degrees

- Why?
  - Maintain standard of living by building a “knowledge-based” workforce
    - Tobacco and manufacturing jobs on a decline
Kentucky’s Need – Adult Education Act of 2000

- **2020 Imperative**
  - U.S. Census Projection
    - KY will need 800,000 adults with a bachelor’s degree or higher

- **Where was KY in 2000?**
  - U.S. Census Data
    - 402,000 Kentuckians with a bachelor’s degrees or higher
Kentucky

• How does Kentucky compare with the other 50 states?
  • In percentage of residents with college degrees and advanced degrees.
(U.S. Census Bureau Statistics)

Bachelors Degree or Higher: Percent, by State
Total Doctoral (2001)
Science and Engineering

Kentucky and Seven Surrounding States

Percent of Population

VA  IL  OH  IN  MO  TN  KY  WV

• The New 5 Questions of Reform

1. Are more Kentuckians ready for postsecondary education?
2. Is Kentucky postsecondary education affordable for its citizens?
3. Do more Kentuckians have certificates and degrees?
4. Are college graduates prepared for life and work in Kentucky?
5. Are Kentucky’s people, communities, and economy benefiting?
What’s Happening in KY?

PBS Documentary

“Declining by Degree”

Summer - 2005
Western Kentucky University

Opening the Doors

(Its Implications)
Kentucky's Mantra
Sink, Tread Water, or Swim

(Time on Task)
Is it Working?

- “Measuring Up 2004”
  The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

- [Kentucky’s] four-year college undergraduates SCORE BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE on assessments of WRITING, CRITICAL THINKING, and PROBLEM-SOLVING skills.

- Kentucky’s four-year college GRADUATES ARE NOT PREPARED FOR GRADUATE STUDY.
  - Not enough Kentuckians score well on examinations needed for admission to graduate school.
What Do Kentucky Students NEED?

College DEGREES

and

College EDUCATIONS
Is more/better lecture the answer?
Lecture Effectiveness

(University of Arizona)
From Teaching to Learning: A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education
Robert Barr and John Tagg

- Shift from INSTRUCTION to LEARNING
- Change from TRANSFERRING KNOWLEDGE to STUDENT DISCOVERY
- Emphasize the CREATION OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS rather than OFFERING CLASSES
“Nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.”

Oscar Wilde
Irish Dramatist, Novelist, and Poet
“There isn't any solution to this problem of Education other than to realize that the best teaching can be done only when there is a direct individual relationship between a student and a good teacher - a situation in which the student discusses the ideas, thinks about the things, and then talks about the things.... It's impossible to learn very much by simply sitting in a lecture, or by doing assigned homework problems.”

Richard Feynman
Nobel Laureate
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:
Can it give Kentucky students the education they need?
What Matters in College?

- The nature of students’ peer group (#1 influence)
- Quality and quantity of student interaction with faculty outside the classroom
- Level of student involvement
- Amount of time spent on task

Twelve Elements of a Quality Education

“Making Quality Count”
Education Commission of the States (1995)

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In What Disciplines Is UR Being Practiced?

Non-Science (47%)  Science (53%)

- Political science, history, sociology, economics (20%)
- Humanities & fine arts (14%)
- Biology (14%)
- Chemistry (13%)
- Psychology (11%)
- Physics (6%)
- Engineering (9%)
- Education (5%)
- Other categories (8%)
  (including interdisciplinary)

Based on student presenter percentages at NCUR
What Institutions in the Region are Promoting UR?

- All Eight Kentucky Public Universities
- University of Tennessee – Knoxville
- University of North Carolina – Asheville
- Appalachian State University
- Middle Tennessee State University
What Evidence Do We Have That Undergraduate Research Works?

Lots of Testimonials and Anecdotal Stories

University of Arizona
What Does the Research on UR Show?

- Few high-quality studies on actual impact of UR on students
  - Most studies look at student satisfaction
- Few studies outside the sciences
Recent Studies

- **Student Benefits**
  1. Lopatto (Grinnell College)
  2. Waddill and Mateja (MSU)

- **Student Intellectual Development**
  1. Rauckhorst, Czaja, and Magolda (Miami University)

- **Impact on Pursuit of Graduate/Professional Degrees**
  1. Hathaway, Nagda, Gregerman (University of Michigan)
Benefits

David Lopatto, Department of Psychology, Grinnell College “The Essential Features of Undergraduate Research”

• Research Question
  • “What BENEFITS do faculty and students perceive from an UR research experience?”

• Surveyed
  • 41 science faculty from Grinnell, Wellesley, and Harvey Mudd Colleges
  • 249 students from these same institutions involved in summer undergraduate research program
Benefits Seen by Students
(One-Time Appointments)

- Enhance professional or academic credentials
- Clarify career path
- Understand the research process in your field
- Learn a topic area in depth
- Develop a continuing relationship with a faculty member
- Learn to work independently
- Learn laboratory techniques
- Learn tolerance for obstacles faced in research process
- Understand how a scientist thinks
- Understand how professionals work on real problems

Red – Murray State Student Responses
Benefits - MSU HHMI Study
(Multiple-Year Appointments)

- Develop **self-confidence**
- Develop a **relationship with a faculty member**
- Clarify **career path**
- Sense of **accomplishment**
- Understand the **personal demands of a career**
- Develop **leadership skills**
- Learn to **persevere at a task**
- Develop **tolerance for obstacles** in research process
- Develop ability to **solve technical/procedural issues**
- Develop an **understanding of how scientists think**
Intellectual Development

Rauckhorst, Czaja, and Magolda
(Miami University)

• Test Group – 100 students in Miami University’s Undergraduate Summer Scholars (USS) Program
  • Students at the end of their Sophomore and Junior Year
  • 10-week period of research/creative activity
  • 25 different departments
Intellectual Development

• Test students’ epistemological assumptions (i.e., assumptions about nature, certainty, and limits of knowledge) and degree of independent thinking

• Four Categories of Knowing
  • **ABSOLUTE KNOWING** (knowledge certain, obtained from authorities)
  • **TRANSITIONAL KNOWING** (some knowledge absolute; must find process to search for the truth)*
  • **INDEPENDENT KNOWING** (most knowledge less than absolute; individuals can have their own beliefs and think for themselves)
  • **CONTEXTUAL KNOWING** (theories constructed based on judgment of evidence; must think through problems and integrate theories)

* Where most students spend their college years
Intellectual Development

Epistemological Change in Research and Control Groups

Percent of Students

Class
Research

Absolute (1) to Transitional (2) Knowing

Transitional (2) to Independent (3) Knowing
Intellectual Development

Four characteristics that helped move students from transitional to independent knowing

• Highlighted the discrepancies in data and encouraging students to embrace multiple perspectives
• Encouraged student ownership and responsibility of the project
• Created a community of scholars in which participants exchange ideas
• Established a mentor/student relationship that provides for student autonomy
Grad/Prof School Pursuit

Hathaway, Nagda, and Gregerman, “The Relationship of Undergraduate Research Participation to Graduate and Professional Education Pursuit: An Empirical Study”

UROP (University of Michigan)
- Open to ALL FRESHMAN and SOPHOMORES
- Admission determined by LOTTERY (All applicants should have the same predisposition to pursue advanced degrees)
- Faculty-student RESEARCH COLLABORATION
- Students work 10 hours/week for credit or work study
- Other program support (orientation, peer group meetings, peer advisor, poster presentation)

Surveyed UROP ALUMNI and CONTROL GROUP
UROP Participation, Other Research, and No Research Experience
Grad School/Research Participation after B.S.

University of Michigan Alumni Survey

- UROP
- Other Research
- No Research

MSU HHMI Participants: 79%
ACTION: Collective

- **KAS**
  - Needs to take a PROACTIVE position
    - Educate administrators and “funders” of higher education in Kentucky – USE STUDIES

- **Posters-at-the-Capitol**
  - Initiative to educate legislators about the importance of UR
ACTION: Institutional

- Develop initiatives to support UR
  - UR Offices (MuSU, UK) – move beyond the sciences
  - Centers of Distinction (NKU, WKU)
  - UR Fellowship/Internship initiatives (MoSU, UK, NKU)
  - Events that “Spotlight” UR
    - Sigma Xi Conference, Scholars Week
  - Awards/Grants
    - Travel Award (NKU), Supplies/Equipment (MuSU)
  - UR Journals (UK, MuSU) – KAS Journal??
ACTION: Individual

• Maximize number of mentored students
  • Create Win-Win scenarios
    • Encourage publication and presentation
      – Start students early
      – Develop teams

• Seek external support
  • EPSCoR (NSF REGs), KBRIN, REU (KAS inter-institutional awards ?)

• Promote UR
  • Have students participate in local and state UR conferences
    • Get it written up in campus and local paper!
Summary

- Clear need in Kentucky for more residents with college EDUCATIONS
- Current strategy coming up short
- Undergraduate Research can address educational needs
- Need for ACTION now!
References


References


• National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. Measuring Up 2004


References


- Waddill, P. and Mateja, J. Unpublished