



## Social Sciences Undergraduate Research Initiative 3-Year Report, 2016-2018

The SSURI program provides financial support for undergraduate involvement in social sciences research. It is designed especially for students in the early stages of their college careers. Through their work with faculty, students develop research skills, deepen their knowledge of an academic field, and enjoy the opportunity to collaborate closely with faculty in a social science research project. In this report, we assess the first three years of the SSURI program.

### **Participants:**

- 18 faculty members representing 9 departments have served as faculty mentors.
- 28 students representing 15 different majors (3 double majors, 1 in a non-Social Science major) have served as research assistants. 42% acceptance rate.
- Student demographics: 4 men and 24 women; Unfortunately, other demographic information is spotty (a problem corrected for Summer 2019).
- Average GPA for research assistants is 3.58, with 63.59 units completed. We explicitly favor applicants who are earlier in their university careers.
- Faculty participants receive \$1000, and students earn \$600 for 50 hours of work, funded by the CSU Student success funding through the Sophomore Year Experience program.

### **Projects and Tasks:**

- Projects cover a wide range of topics (see Table 1).
- Faculty reported very positive experiences with their research assistants (see Table 2). Some found it “rejuvenating” to work with an assistant, while others were glad to be freed from more routine tasks to focus on complicated tasks like writing.
- Students engaged in a wide range of tasks including conducting reviews of relevant literature; finding and analyzing primary archival sources for history projects; writing and vetting survey items; helping to create, conduct, and transcribe semi-structured interviews; and coding student essays (including developing codes).
- Student participants valued learning specific skills – such as time management, use of databases, or the creation of survey and interview questions.

- Students also remarked on the importance of learning what high-quality social science research requires (see Table 3).

#### **Program Strengths:**

- Students participants were uniformly enthusiastic about the program.
- In particular, students valued the opportunity for direct personal contact with a faculty mentor, the flexibility in work hours, and their relative independence.
- In general, faculty reported that they made significant progress on their particular project.
- Faculty also found the students they worked with to be inquisitive, conscientious, and creative contributors.
- The most common request from both faculty and students was for more hours and/or more support to continue the projects.

#### **Goals for Improvement:**

- Expand the number of projects available, hours students can work, funding for faculty, and flexibility for faculty to work with teams.
- Support faculty in writing clear, attractive descriptions of projects and in providing appropriate structure for students.
- Improve student understanding and use of the payment system.
- Look at ways to help orient and/or support students in terms of skills and expectations.

#### **Products and Outcomes:**

- SSURI projects have resulted in a variety of faculty conference papers and publications (see Table 4).
- Some student assistants have presented results at conferences.
- Several SSURI students have been accepted to Master's Programs and at least one has been accepted to a doctoral program.

#### **Summary:**

In its first three years, SSURI has met its program goal of enabling lower-division students to participate in faculty research. Work with a faculty member and participation in research are a high-impact practices for engaging and retaining students and supporting them in their academic progress. Overall, this has been a very positive experience for both student and faculty participants.

As a high-impact practice, SSURI supports SSU’s strategic goals for student success and quality education. By paying students an hourly wage, SSURI also fosters inclusivity in academic research, by welcoming low-income students who might not otherwise be able to participate in research.

**Table 1.** Short summary of SSURI projects, Summer 2016-Summer 2018

Reviewed primary source material housed at the San Francisco GLBT History Society	Lober
Analyzed results from survey of local school counselors following the 2017 Santa Rosa fire	Buckley
Designed materials for an experimental investigation of older adults’ attitudes toward physicians	Smith
Created database to organize material relevant for understanding human remains from the ancient Middle East and eastern Mediterranean	Boutin
Created PowerPoint presentation for new book that documents the power of global elites	Phillips
Transcribed (in Spanish) Southern Peruvian adolescent boys’ conversations while playing E-sports	Smith
Located and reviewed original government documents related to the “lost coast” area of California	Watt
Prepared and transcribed interviews with surfers from the American South	Estes
Organized data about the composition and voting history of California congressional districts	McCuan
Located newspaper coverage of the Berkeley Free Clinic (first established in 1969)	McQuade
Conducted evaluation research for the SSU Sexual Violence Task Force	Reyes
Analyzed data to determine whether a week long “electronic media fast” completed by undergraduates was effective in reducing stress and increasing academic engagement	Gomes
Began design of study of how police and judges use their discretionary power when making decisions	Grant
Coded student reflection assignments for evidence of development growth	Smith/Jolly
Gathered background information for evaluation of Santa Rosas restorative justice intervention	Jackson
Helped design experimental test of adults’ attitudes toward transgender people	Callahan
Helped assess the effectiveness of the Migrant Education Advisor Program (MEAP)	Buckley
Analyzed soils collected from a cave in Guerrero, Mexico	Goman

**Table 2.** Selected faculty comments

- A Learning + Labor focus is a winning approach for undergraduate research. The articles and our meetings provided her with a rich one-on-one experience, but she also accomplished tasks that would have taken me far more time to do given my schedule.
- I learned that it is really great to talk to a bright, motivated student about your research questions and have them come up with new perspectives that one had not thought about before. Really cool, something I'd expect from colleagues, but was very pleased at how we were able to bounce ideas off one another. The student learned about the research process, and I had the benefit of her ideas and perspectives.
- Unfortunately, there wasn't lots of data on the sites we searched. The key newspapers and collections that cover my topic have not been digitized—but I did not know this before we started the research—so we learned something. The student researcher was able to find some relevant archival material on related topics.
- It was a good experience for the students, especially since they knew that the research that they were doing would have an impact on campus. Requiring them to review the literature on the subject matter forced them to know and understand everything there is to know about the issue.
- I still struggle with how much to let this experience be self-directed/self-determined (how I've done it) vs. me telling the students what to do . . . hard to know which is best. I guess that is not so much what I learned but what I struggled with. 😊
- Student assistants are an invaluable part of the research process, particularly when given clear directions and goals.
- I learned that it is useful and fun to have a research assistant, but it's challenging to devise work that is easy for her to do.
- Both students were exceptionally conscientious and well-qualified. They were true partners in the research. They were also very capable of learning new skills as needed to carry out the needed tasks (such as learning SPSS and how to create a poster).
- It is always rejuvenating to work with smart, interested, and driven students.

**Table 3.** Selected student comments

- [My faculty mentor] was very helpful . . . he made sure to take his time with all the new information to assure that I fully understood what we were doing. He explained many new psychology terms that were used, or applied, in his or others' papers. I learned a great deal about social justice and the widespread views of people around the country. I learned how to write surveys and the ways in which wording can affect a participant's answers.
- I learned more in depth the steps needed to conduct research for this type of a paper. I had already taken a research methods class but this was a more applicable application of those skills. It made it seem like a "less scary" or super formal thing, which has changed my perspective on research-based work.
- I learned that research takes time and it's easier said than done. Searching a topic and referencing the first few articles you find isn't an efficient way of researching something. It takes time to do efficient research such as noting a variety of articles and resources with correlating topics and reoccurring themes.
- On top of gaining research skills, I vastly enlarged my knowledge on sexual assault on campus and possible contributors to its occurrence. Lastly, because I was doing the work for the most part independently, it taught me time management and discipline that will help me in my future classes and jobs.
- I learned a lot from my experience, specifically what kinds of data political scientists use to make predictions about elections, how said data is compiled, and what constitutes a "swing district." As someone who follows politics, it was fascinating to learn about what goes into the behind-the-scenes formation of political analysis the general public consumes.
- I learned that there is a lot that goes into any research. I pretty much already knew that but also seeing it firsthand and actually taking part in the process drove the point home for me. I also used to have less respect for qualitative research and kind of assumed quantitative was better and more difficult, but boy was I wrong. I have mad respect for qualitative researchers now.

**Table 4.** Presentations, Publications and Other Outcomes supported by SSURI grants

- Estes, S. (April 2019). "Southern Surfers Talk Story," Impact Zones and Liminal Spaces: The Culture and History of Surfing Conference at San Diego State University. Articles based on this project are currently under review at the *Journal of Southern History* and the *Oral History Review*.
- Jolly, M., Smith, H., & Nguyen, A. (forthcoming 2019). "Sonoma State University: The Sophomore Year Experience," in *Aligning Institutional Support for Student Success: Case Studies of Sophomore-Year Initiatives*.
- Gomes, M. (4/25/2018). Five Reasons to Take a Break From Screens. *Greater Good Science Center*, [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five\\_reasons\\_to\\_take\\_a\\_break\\_from\\_screens](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_reasons_to_take_a_break_from_screens)
- Duffau, E., Dittmore, E., Peglotti, P., Lanier, R., Fabbri, C., Madrigal, P., Coil, J. & Smith, H.J. (August 2018) *Individual Relative Deprivation and Mental Health Among University Students: Cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence*. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, California.
- Myers, A, Bush, J. & Gomes. M (2017). The Electronic Media Fast and Student Well-being: Lessons from Positive Psychology. Poster presented at the annual meeting of the Western Psychological Association, Sacramento, California.
- Buckley, M., & Robello, A. (2018). *After the Wildfires: School counselor respond*. Presentation at the Sonoma County School Counselors' Association, Santa Rosa, CA.