University of Alabama-Huntsville/NASA Marshall Space Flight Center Heliophysics REU

A Model For Recruiting Targeted Groups

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www.uah.edu/cspar/research/reu
Summary

• 10 week program in Huntsville, Al
• Requirements:
  • Full-time undergraduate student
  • 2.5 GPA, 2 letters of rec, essay.
• Research Topics include instrument design to modeling.

3 years in operation > 5 year proposal submitted.
Objectives

1. Reduce the attrition rate among freshman and sophomores.
   - STEM students leave during freshman and sophomore years.
   - Research can mitigate this but, REUs have become increasingly competitive. Often students with no experience, young students, and those from small non-research universities are not selected.

2. Increase minority participation in the sciences, heliophysics, in particular.
   - Minorities are under-represented in every faction of STEM.
   - Recruitment presents a major challenge to REUs.
   - Expanded our reach to community college and first gens.

3. Provide a scientifically relevant research experience
   - We show that inexperienced students can participate in research with high scientific merit given a supportive environment.
Challenges

• Heliospherics Physics is a small, specialized field.
• 15-20% of Black students attend HBCUs, however they produce close to 50% of undergraduate STEM and 75% of PhDs.
Advantages

- Nearby HBCUs & Universities with First Gens
- CSPAR-NASA Shared Facility
Approach

Reducing STEM Attrition Rate

- Actively seek and select students with no experience, freshman, sophomores, and students from small non-research universities.
- A mix of experienced and inexperienced students
- Active mentor placement with research projects and advisors based on experience level, advisor expectations and personality.
- Introductory tutorials and lectures geared towards students with no experience and lectures increasingly complex throughout the summer.
- Develop a healthy cohort using a shared working & living space.
- Active shared mentors, co-mentors and graduate student mentor groups, PIs and coordinator also serve as shared or group mentors, and counselors.

Careful student/mentor pairing, mixed group experienced with inexperienced students, introductory lectures, and high involvement of mentors create an environment productive to all participants.
Approach

Targeted Recruitment Efforts

In Person Recruitment Efforts

- Visit targeted schools
- Give presentations to student organizations, workshops during intro courses, and host pizza lunches.

1. Establishes a relationship with department chairs, professors and student leaders. This is critical for students at small universities/HBCUs.

2. Reduces anxiety and intimidation. This may be a major factor for students.

In person recruitment efforts at targeted universities have a large impact on applicant pool.
Approach

- Rely on recommendation letters and interest letter, rather than strictly on GPA. Some of our most successful students were below ‘ideal’ for other programs.

- Including a factor of “need” into our selection process. The availability of research at their home institution or nearby institutions.

A more flexible selection process is key to improving minority participation in science and slowing the attrition rate among young STEM students.

Remaining Challenge Many first generation college students, and students from small universities do not have substantial experience writing letters of interest, nor persons to provide feedback on what REU selection committees look for.
Approach

Development of Student Cohort to produce Confident, Better Informed Participants

Shared Work and Living Accommodations
Students with more programming experience assist those students with less experience.

Career and professional development workshops.
Resume writing workshops
What to expect in graduate school
Alternative Careers in Physics

Organized Recreation with Mentors and Scientists
Tours and frequent visits, talks, caving.

Developing a positive learning environment is important for overall research experience.
### Successes

#### Increased Diversity and Participation from Freshman and Sophomores

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number Applicants/Participants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Number</td>
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<td>7/3</td>
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<td>28/3</td>
<td>23/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freshman/Sophomores</strong></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Minorities ~ 20%- 60%, Freshman & Sophomores ~50%, Non-Research intensive universities ~%50
Successes

Student Participation & Confidence

Participation

• Our students have been Co-author on 5 refereed journal articles, one in Science. (more in prep).

• ALL students have submitted posters to AGU and we have had 18 students attend AGU over the 3 year period, also co-authors on AAS posters.

• 2 have become graduate students at UAHuntsville in Heliophysics related fields.

• # currently in graduate school.

Student Confidence

• Frequent surveying suggests that participants have a more clear idea what graduate school. Thus, they will be able to make a more informed decision.

• *How do you feel about conducting research under the supervision of a mentor* Before the program 2/9 stated feeling “very comfortable”, with the rest “comfortable”. After the program 6/9 felt “very comfortable.

• Many students have had ‘life changing experiences’.
Visit 2014 REU Student Posters Tomorrow!!

Ian Synder SH51C-4179 Moscone West 8-12 am
(Also Sterling, SH53D-04)
Reyann Joiner SH53b-4211. Moscone South 1:40-600pm
Shane Alpert, SH51C-4182 Moscone West 8:00-12:20pm