Promoting undergraduate research publishing: next steps in supporting undergraduate research engagement

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As the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) celebrates its 30th Anniversary, we find ourselves reflecting on the numerous ways in which our program has supported undergraduate students in their research engagement. From the initial and early exposure to faculty-led research projects, to the first opportunity to present at the UROP Spring Research Symposium, from providing funding to present at national research conferences, to the opportunity to engage full-time in research through Summer Fellowships, UROP has expanded the liberal arts education of over 40,000 students in three decades. The opportunity to serve UM students further by supporting undergraduate research publishing came as a natural next step, and doing so by partnering with UMURJ as a student-led, peer and faculty reviewed publication, made the prospect increasingly exciting.

Given the tremendous contributions undergraduate students have made to UROP projects over the years, we have seen many of them co-authoring publications with their research mentors and teams. This has enhanced student research experience and has provided them with the full cycle of research from project design, to methods implementation, analysis, and drafting manuscripts. We have also seen students contributing to large book projects that only materialized years after their participation in the project, but faculty recognized their invaluable work in the acknowledgements section. With that said, not all research can provide the benefits of publication to their undergraduate assistants even though at UROP, we have definitely noticed the rewarding nature of being involved in the publication process.

As such, in 2017, we took our role as advising unit to UMURJ to the next level and entered a larger partnership with the U-M Office of Research (UMOR) and MPublishing/MLibrary to create a framework for a more sustainable

publication, guided by the UMURJ student editors and the needs they had identified. The past two years of collaboration could not have been more successful: with our MLibrary partners, we have co-designed and proposed a course on peer-reviewed publishing practice, MPublishing has provided a sustainable online platform for manuscript submissions and review process, UMOR has been instrumental in getting all partners around the table, UMURJ editors have been approved to present at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) looking to expand their recruitment efforts outside U-M, and they have strengthened their reach outside STEM fields to include more social science and humanities research work.

By showcasing undergraduate research from all college disciplines and providing students with an opportunity to develop their professional writing skills, we enable them to engage with and share intellectual activity with the wider communities within and beyond the University. Providing our undergraduates with opportunities to publish their work moves beyond writing for the award of a grade, to recognition that research is a key component of learning and student experience and the work undertaken is of interest to a wider community with associated value and legacy. We believe this collaboration has been crucial in empowering student researchers through publishing and preparing them in following the peer-reviewed process in the future. It has also meant exposing undergraduate leaders to a network of higher-ed professionals, collaboration, mentorship, and curriculum design, which are all invaluable experiences that complement their research skills and add value to their undergraduate career as a whole. We want to congratulate the UMURJ team on their hard work, leadership, and achievements, and we look forward to our next years of collaboration!

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