

ACUR UGR X-change colloquium: Report

Around 50 participants from across Australia and New Zealand met at the inaugural ACUR undergraduate research x-change colloquium, hosted by the University of Sydney Business School, 4 December 2019. The meeting opened with a warm introduction from Emeritus Professor Angela Brew (ACUR Chair) and Prof. Pip Patterson, Deputy VC (Education) at the University of Sydney, who highlighted the significance of this event and advocated that research projects ideally be offered to every undergraduate student up for the challenge.

The purpose of this meeting was to share practice, new ideas, discuss future possibilities, providing an opportunity to hear what others are doing in this space. Importantly the colloquium serves to strengthen the ACUR community, which includes 77 steering group members, academics, students, and academic managers. The day was structured around a keynote address, two sessions, a workshop and panel discussion.

A very stimulating keynote was given by a joint talk from academic mentor (Prof. Susan Rowland) and undergraduate student (Lauren Carpenter) reporting on research they conducted on UQ's Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programme, discussing links between undergraduate research experiences (UREs) and employability. While the benefits of combining WIL and URE are demonstrable, both staff and students had difficulty in articulating clear relationships with employability per se, suggesting work is needed to clarify and crystallise these connections. Is undergraduate research a vehicle for employability development? It was clear that UGR certainly has potential to develop student employability.

The first session focused on institutional approaches to developing undergraduate research engagement. Prof. Philippa Levy presented the experience and process at the University of Adelaide where curriculum reform is seeking to integrate Inquiry Based Learning (IBL) throughout the undergraduate curricula offered at the university. The strategy is in the process of development, but as part of the process, Adelaide provides the opportunity for undergraduates to present their research at a university-wide conference. Watch this space!

Prof. Denise Wood presented on the Rising Stars initiative at the multi-campus University of Central Queensland. This programme engages undergraduates in research through a fellowship initiative, for which students apply and participate from across a range of disciplines, campuses, as well as off-campus environments. The initiative seeks to embed research across the university curriculum, not only to improve postgraduate pathways, but also to promote the value of disciplinary skills, deeper approaches to learning, increase student confidence and sense of belonging in their Community of Practice with their supervisor mentors. It was great to see demand for this programme growing, and organically so.

Sarah Campbell gave the final presentation in this session on developing the researchers of tomorrow at UQ using Summer & winter Research programmes, offering extra-curricular research experience to connect students with professional networks, enhance employability, explore interest, improve feed to HDR (Higher Degree Research).

This session concluded with Roundtable discussions, which provided opportunities for participants to share and reflect on practices in the room and connect more deeply with the presented material.

The afternoon session focused on Faculty and Departmental strategies for encouraging UGR and inquiry. These provided useful specific case studies on how undergraduate research is supported at a departmental level.

The Psychology Undergraduate Conference Travel Scheme at Macquarie University was reported by A/Prof Kevin Brooks. This scheme provides a departmental travel grant to assist students to present at ACUR and translate benefits of UGR at conclusion of their work. The Scheme helped develop a

self-formed student community and explains very strong showing of Macquarie at the latest ACUR conference (1 in 20)! At \$200 per student, this proved a cost effective way to develop superior research-based learning.

Louise Brown talked about the international Genetically Engineered Machine competition (a global science competition) where some amazing things happen, with one teams' research published in Nature, such is the quality of this URE! It was quite inspiring to see what UGR capable of achieving. Prof Philip Poronik, Sydney, finished the session discussing students as co-creators in interdisciplinary learning, with student experience at the heart and focus of activity, focused on capstone projects where students from different disciplines work in teams.

This session concluded with further Roundtable discussions. Three short workshops were then offered, providing opportunity for more focused discussion and activity among participants. This was a valuable, if slightly abbreviated (only 45 minutes available) activity.

The day concluded with focus on the student experience. A panel of four UG students answered questions from the floor on what they had gained from engaging in UGR. It was clear that the overwhelming experience of this cohort was positive, testifying to a boost in confidence, skills development, active learning, critical thinking, adapting to a new environment, cultivation of supervisor relationships, getting a step-ahead, figuring out what they like, all being benefits of UGR. These students were passionate about their research, developed best without the pressure to perform in assessments.

What did we learn? UGR can be top quality and in preparing students for future research and career options, identifies and develops their passions. This was a very valuable and worthwhile day. Thank you to ACUR for organising such a stimulating event. I thoroughly recommend it.

Prof. Ian Fuller
Massey University, Palmerston North