

Project Name

SUNY Distance Mentored Undergraduate Research: Leveraging System Expertise to Enhance Learning

Principal Investigator Lori Bernard

Campus Geneseo, State University College at

Year of Project 2012

Tier Tier Three

Project Team

- Jack Croxton, SUNY Fredonia
- Danielle Garneau, SUNY Plattsburgh
- Shashi Kanbur, SUNY Oswego

Overview Summary

Computer mediated technology to support undergraduate research mentoring and exploration of technology use in faculty development.

Outcomes Summary

Recommendations for use of virtual tools for mentorship is available [here](#).

Project Abstract

We propose to expand into the SUNY system a model of distance mentored undergraduate research (UR) which has been funded by a Teagle Foundation grant award of \$150,000 to the Council of Public Liberal Arts College (COPLAC). The COPLAC pilot program will begin in July of 2012. We propose to expand this pilot program to include students and faculty members from a total of four SUNY colleges.

Geneseo is one of 11 COPLAC member institutions which will participate in the implementation plan for

distance UR mentoring. The COPLAC program is led by Co-Directors William Spellman, Director of COPLAC (located in Asheville, NC), and Steven Greenlaw, Professor of Economics at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, VA. The intent of the project is “to enhance student learning by sharing disciplinary expertise across campuses in a 'distance' mode and re-envision faculty work and encourage institutional efficiencies at predominantly undergraduate, teaching institutions in the public sector.”

Led by Project Director Lori Bernard, we will utilize the same program design and assessment strategies as those of the COPLAC program. Specific questions to be answered by the project include:

1. What is the impact of distance mentored undergraduate research (UR) on student learning? How does it compare to face-to-face mentored UR projects?
2. Does the impact of distance mentored UR differ when considering one-on-one versus small group experiences?
3. What is the impact of distance mentored UR on the faculty member's professional identity and research agenda?
4. What are the implications of distance mentoring for faculty work and the faculty rewards system?
5. How might faculty work be reallocated to reflect the value of distance mentored UR after a successful pilot project?
6. What are the implications of distance mentoring for expanding opportunities for collaborations across the consortium?

The first track of the project involves distance mentored undergraduate research. Each participating SUNY institution will identify a Program Coordinator who will publicize the program to faculty and students, identify interested faculty mentors, and coordinate assessment activities. Following the COPLAC model, a minimum of ten faculty members who would like to volunteer as distance mentors will be identified by each participating SUNY campus. Faculty participants will provide information related to their research interests, current projects, and subject areas in which they would be willing to mentor undergraduates from another SUNY institution via the web-based application Macademia (<http://macademia.macalester.edu/Macademia/>). The Macademia system will allow students to rapidly identify faculty in their interest areas. We expect that approximately two faculty members from each participating institution will be identified by undergraduates for collaboration. Students and faculty members in all fields may participate in the distance mentoring component of the pilot program. For each distance-mentored UR project, a comparable face-to-face project will be identified by each campus for use in a control comparison.

We propose to establish the pilot program and have faculty mentors identified during the fall 2012 semester. Research projects will be carried out during the spring 2013 semester. Students will register for one credit of directed study or independent research. Each faculty member who directs a distance project will have access to an \$800 personal research account that can be used for research-related travel, equipment, and supplies. Students will have a similar account in the amount of \$500, with use restricted to activities and materials connected to the distance-mentored project.

The demonstration project will involve computer-mediated mentoring, which we believe can provide for a close and effective research relationship between student researchers and faculty mentors. Many tools are available for free or at a modest cost. For example: Skype or Google Hangout for conferencing; Google Docs for sharing and collaborating on documents; Wordpress for blogging or journaling about the research process; Basecamp HQ for project management and document sharing; Facetime (iPad/iPod Touch application) has live conferencing features which might work well with field projects. Each faculty and student participant will be provided with Skype recording software and basic USB cameras. In addition, each institution will be provided with a portable video-conferencing set-up which can be used for digital recordings and/or live streaming (preferably via Internet2) in circumstances where interactive demonstration is preferred. On each campus, the program coordinator will serve as the contact person for scheduling use of the portable video-conferencing set-up.

The second track of the project explores the implications of distance mentoring for faculty work and the faculty

rewards system, including tenure and promotion. A series of teleconference meetings will be scheduled for the project director, the institutional coordinators and faculty mentors. These meetings will focus on faculty identity, professional development and the campus rewards system, and advance discussion of the faculty work implications of distance mentoring. Information from the SUNY meetings will be shared with the COPLAC Steering Council.

The positive impact of a successful pilot and future program expansion would be significant. The 13 SUNY comprehensive colleges enroll over 80,000 undergraduates and employ approximately 3,500 full-time faculty members. A successful model for distance mentoring of undergraduate research has the potential to open up multiple areas of disciplinary expertise that are not available to undergraduate researchers on all college campuses. Distance mentoring would leverage the strength of SUNY colleges to offer students the range of faculty expertise more commonly associated with a large Research-1 university.

Reports and Resources

- [Project final report](#)

Instructional Design

- Online Education