Chapter 37
Kindling Research Interest in Undergraduate Business Students:
Beyond Superficial Pragmatism

David Starr-Glass

University of New York in Prague, Czech Republic & SUNY Empire State College – Prague, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate Research Experiences (UREs) provide a means of encouraging, engaging, and supporting students in the co-production of relevant and legitimate knowledge. Research-centered experiences can be designed as capstones at the conclusion of the undergraduate degree, integrated into single courses or sequence of interrelated courses, or form an element of internships, community-based projects, service-learning experiences, and practicums. UREs have a high impact on student engagement and learning, and can serve as vehicles for establishing the student's distinctive personal signature on his or her learning. However, despite their value, UREs are underutilized in business education. This chapter explores some of the reasons for this, suggests ways through which undergraduates might be introduced to research, and argues that an involvement in relevant scholarly endeavor plays a significant part in the future success of business graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate business education is often framed in terms of delivering practical skills and pragmatic competencies to those who wish to develop their careers in management and business contexts. This narrow, utilitarian, and instrumental attitude often differentiates business undergraduates from those enrolled in other social science disciplines, or the liberal arts. In part, the narrow approach to undergraduate

business education is a product of undergraduate concern about securing future employment. In part, it is also a cultural artifact regarding the value of research often held by faculty, especially adjuncts.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, student concern with what might appear to be the pragmatic may actually limit their futures success in the fast moving, rapidly changing, and increasingly complex and globalized business world (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011; Datar, Garvin, & Cullen, 2010). Narrow pragmatism runs counter to the demands and expectations of future employers, who are hiring and promoting graduates with the ability to engage in critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving, and effective communication—all areas often under-prioritized by students and faculty in the undergraduate business curriculum (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2011; Cai, 2013).

Student undergraduate research experiences (UREs) offer a potent mechanism for engaging business students with the subject matter they encounter in the curriculum and for providing opportunities to explore the real-world issues that these students will meet in their careers and professions. UREs can also create stimulating and potentially beneficial connections and collaborative links between students and faculty. Further, direct personal involvement with research and scholarly activities allows business students to appreciate the value of deep subject-matter learning and to recognize the value of continuous professional development and engagement in the work-world after graduation (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Hensel, 2012; Osborn & Karukstis, 2009). In summary, "there is one more benefit of a good research experience that may be simply stated: a research experience helps one to be a better student" (Lopatto, 2010, p. 29).

The first section of this chapter provides background by reviewing the increasing engagement of undergraduate students in UREs and in scholarly endeavor. The second section discusses the particular problems involved with initiating and sustaining research and scholarly approaches in undergraduate business education. This section contains a number of suggestions and recommendations that might be useful for students, faculty members involved with UREs, and the institutions of higher learning in which they are both embedded. The third section considers research avenues that seem particularly valuable to pursue, while the concluding section briefly restates some of the main themes of the chapter.

BACKGROUND

In U.S. higher education—and particularly at research-focused universities—a tension has always existed between the extent to which institutions should emphasize the *research* or the *teaching* efforts of their faculty. Linked to the falling quality of undergraduate experiences and learning outcomes, the Boyer Commission's (1998) challenged research universities to re-invent themselves by including *all* students in research-driven undergraduate teaching, arguing that "the basic idea of learning as inquiry is the same as the idea of research; even though advanced research occurs at advanced levels, undergraduates beginning in the freshman year can learn through research" (p. 17). The report recommended that universities should form "a synergistic system in which faculty and students are learners and researchers, whose interactions make for a healthy and flourishing intellectual atmosphere" (p. 11).

The Boyer Commission (1998) report had a considerable impact on research universities and the recommendations that a research element should be part of the undergraduate experience "resonated most strongly with faculty and administrators" (Katkin, 2003, p. 24). However, these recommendations were not restricted to the prestigious research universities; in time, they began to percolate throughout all areas of U.S. higher educational, creating a *research across the curriculum* movement that attempted

10 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/kindling-research-interest-in-undergraduate-business-students/274390

Related Content

Identifying Blind Spots in Leadership Development
Timothy W. Turnerand Richard J. Conroy (2021). *Research Anthology on Business and Technical Education in the Information Era (pp. 453-474).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/identifying-blind-spots-in-leadership-development/274377

The Sociocultural Outlook for Education and Business Interaction
Mikhail Epshtein (2019). *Business Community Engagement for Educational Initiatives (pp. 1-24).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-sociocultural-outlook-for-education-and-business-interaction/212884

To Teach Leadership Ethically or to Teach Ethical Leadership?: Leadership Education in the Polish Executive Education Context
Mike Szymanskiand Anna Olszewska (2021). *Research Anthology on Business and Technical Education in the Information Era (pp. 1317-1333).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/to-teach-leadership-ethically-or-to-teach-ethical-leadership/274429

The Role of Honors Education Programs
Mohammad Ayub Khan (2015). *Diverse Contemporary Issues Facing Business Management Education (pp. 162-181).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-role-of-honors-education-programs/117358

Reflective Cycles and Reflexive Learning Principles: Teaching Ethics from the Learner Outward1
Michael Nancarrowand Will Rifkin (2012). *Handbook of Research on Teaching Ethics in Business and Management Education (pp. 387-412).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflective-cycles-reflexive-learning-principles/61820