


# Chapter 9

## Shaping the Future of Student Engagement: Opportunities and Challenges for an Annual Research Day

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Student engagement is more than a term used for safeguarding academic success and earning a degree. The term includes the important factors that assist in preparing students for life outside the learning environment and allows for the cultivation of skills and experiences that will sustain them throughout their personal and professional lives. This chapter explores the Theory of Student Involvement as a foundation on which student engagement has been built. Next, the chapter investigates the various dimensions of student engagement, how student research can be utilized as an approach for keeping students engaged and uses a real-world example of how one department developed an annual research day that incorporated student research. In conclusion, lessons learned and action steps for starting one's own annual research day is discussed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is more than a term used for ensuring academic success and earning a degree. The term includes the important factors that assist in preparing students for life outside the learning environment and allows for the cultivation of skills and experiences that will sustain them throughout their personal and professional lives. This chapter will start with examining the foundational work of the Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984). This theory provides a framework that helps describe how students engage with their educational experiences. Central is the idea that student involvement plays a crucial role in fostering both academic success and personal development. Astin's theory posits that the more students actively participate in their learning and campus activities, the greater the chances for achieving positive academic, personal, and social outcomes.

Next, the chapter will delve into descriptions for student engagement. While student engagement is commonly identified as a pivotal element of effective learning, there is not always a clear and standard interpretation. Through the investigation of the different aspects of student engagement, the reader will better understand how researchers are defining student engagement and how there are several factors that impact a student's engagement level.

The chapter will demonstrate how student research can be an effective way to keep students engaged. The authors will review Little's (2020) work considering student researchers that have presented their work and the impact that such an event has on them. Furthermore, the chapter will explore the benefits and challenges of student research demonstrating the various components that can create success or stymie engagement.

Seeking opportunities for faculty and student researchers to demonstrate their work and achieve the benefits of student research while minimizing the challenges can be problematic with institutional, monetary, and time constraints. The chapter will then explain why having an annual research day that allows students to present their research was adopted. Additionally, the timeline for the creation of the event will be discussed to show the growth and productive nature of the event as well as discuss some of the challenges that were encountered. Finally, the chapter will conclude with lessons learned and action steps for starting one's own annual research day. This work aims to provide a foundational understanding of the student engagement within the context of student research and provides a real-life example of how one department has worked to maximize the benefits and offset the difficulties.

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