

FROM CLASSROOM TO COMMUNITY: ENHANCING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH THROUGH AN INTERDISCIPLINARY COHORT MODEL

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A close-up, dark-toned photograph of a microscope. The objective lenses are prominent, with some text like '10X', '20X', and '40X' visible on them. A slide with a small green specimen is positioned on the stage. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark filter and a white rectangular border.

UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE IN
RESEARCH
= BENEFICIAL



The Emerging Scholars Program

A community-based cohort model research program that matches undergraduate students to research projects developed by faculty at the University of Massachusetts Lowell.

Findings:



Cohort-model effectively built a robust community



Fosters positive relationships between students, mentors, and fellow colleagues.



Relationships help develop professional skills and provide emotional support that allows students to collaborate on shared solutions and aim higher in their professional goals.



Structure of the Program

- Leadership Team
 - 5 faculty members
 - Oversee program operations, facilitate yearly pairing of students and faculty projects, promote training for mentors.
 - 2 graduate student coordinators
 - Point of contact between students and mentors
 - Promote monthly meetings with students focused on professional development.

Structure of the Program

Faculty Selection:

- Application explaining research project, expectations, plan of action.
- Faculty mentors are interviewed by leadership team.

Student Selection:

- Minimum requirements: 3.25GPA, full-time standing as junior or senior, major in FAHSS.
- Students submit writing sample, resumes, and recommendation from faculty.
- Leadership team then matches students with projects which fit their interests and conduct interviews with student and mentor together.

Structure of the Program

- 10 students/year
- Students work 9 hours per week
- Weekly Meetings
- Monthly cohort meetings
- 3 yearly events:
 - Orientation
 - Mid-Year Event
 - Student Symposium



Methods

Survey

- 73 alums from 2011-2020 contacted
- 17 answered an anonymous survey on Qualtrics
- Survey asked students to identify and rank features of the program that were the most influential on their research experiences:
 - Meeting with other students and faculty, connections made, relationship with student coordinator, research topic, relationship with mentors

Semi-Structured Interviews

- Randomly selected 6 alums to participate in semi-structured interviews.
- Interview questions:
 - Student involvement in ES events
 - Challenges experienced in college and during the program
 - Interdisciplinary aspect of the program
- Interviews lasted between 30-50 minutes.

Data Analysis and Results

Undergraduate student experience in research has tremendous benefits

The most impactful aspect was relationships with fellow students in the program and faculty mentors,

The community aspects built into the structure of the program were meaningful: proved space for interdisciplinary study, opportunities for building professional development and skills, and emotional support

Figure 1: Relationships with Fellow Students and Faculty Mentors

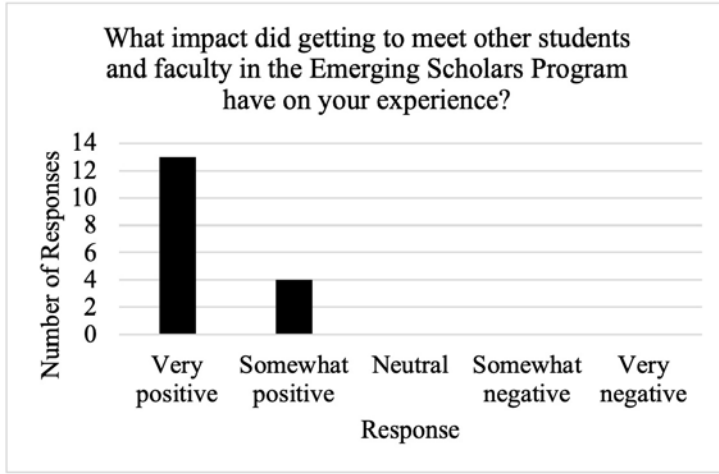
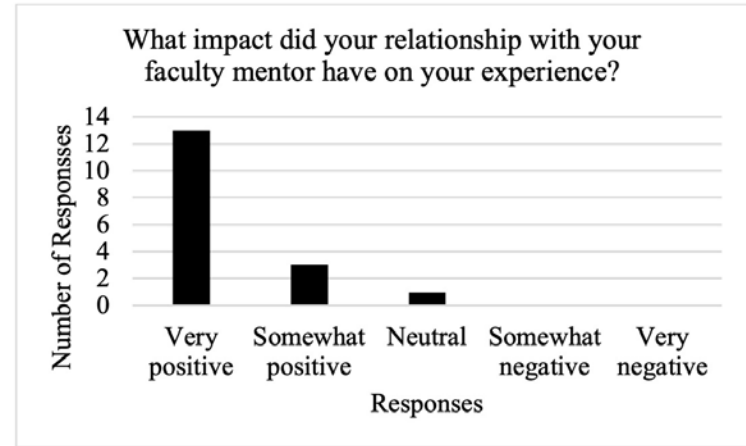
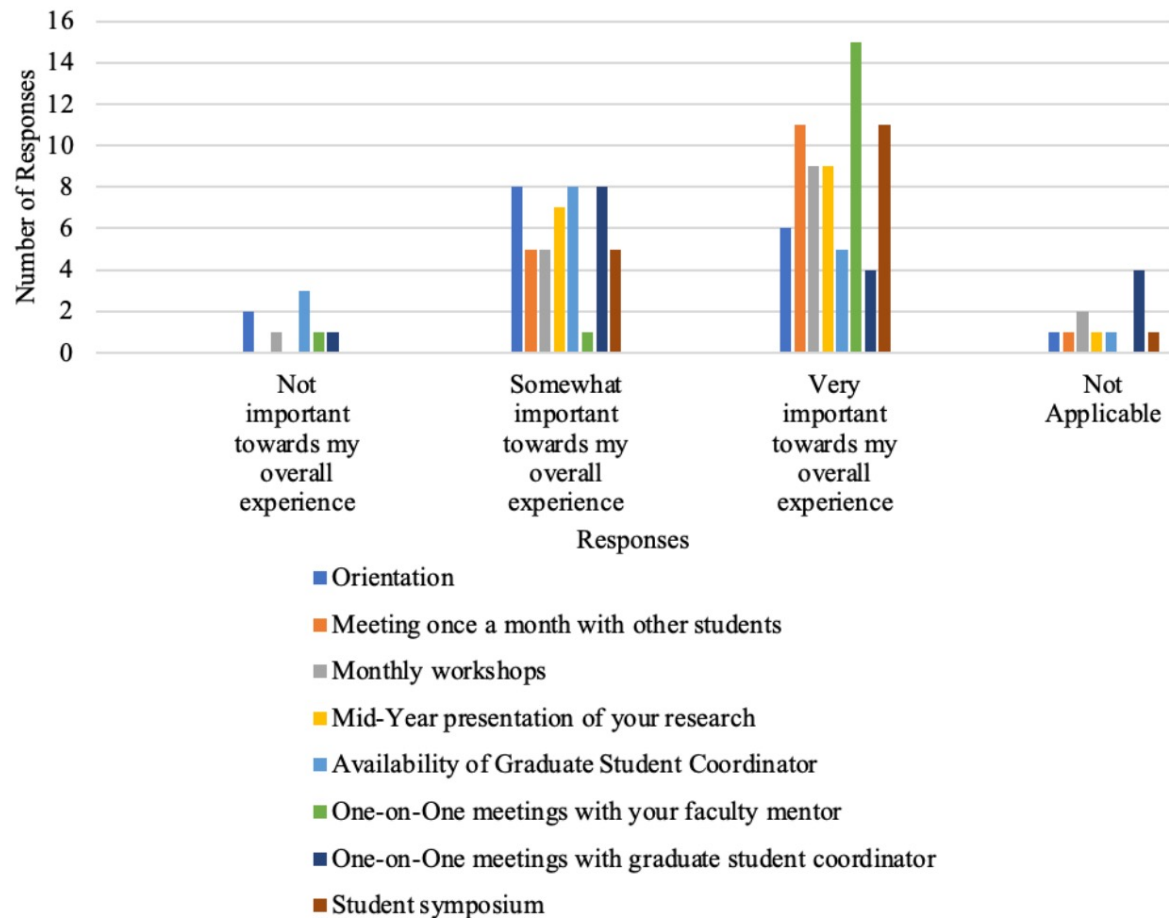


Figure 2: Relationship with Faculty Mentor



Rating Community Aspects in Importance to Overall Experience in the Program





Conclusion and Takeaways

- The development of meaningful relationships between students and faculty mentors
- Community and cohort aspect:
 - Interdisciplinary
 - Improve skills like public speaking
 - Share experiences
 - Work together to solve problems
 - Safety net = achieve goals

"I loved working with a group of peers and professors who I was truly inspired by and saw as amazing mentors."



**The Emerging
Scholars Program**

“My workload was oddly therapeutic. There was a great ease in sitting down with a group of students that I wouldn't normally be with to chat about academics, workload, and the like.”



**The Emerging
Scholars Program**

"I have really enjoyed following the life updates of my fellow emerging scholars. It seems like everyone I studied with has gone on to be successful in achieving the goals they set out to accomplish."



**The Emerging
Scholars Program**



How Does This Relate To Honors Colleges?

- Honors Fellowship and City-ship Changes:
 - Streamlined application process.
 - Students join the program at the start of each semester
 - Students and faculty have expectations meeting
 - Partnership contract
 - Honors College team monthly check-ins with students and faculty

Q&A and Discussion

1. What metrics should be used to evaluate the success of undergraduate research programs?
2. How do you balance interdisciplinary collaboration with ensuring depth of knowledge in a student's primary field of study?
3. What strategies could be used to create more inclusive undergraduate research opportunities, especially for underrepresented students?
4. How should universities incentivize faculty participation in cohort-based undergraduate research programs?
5. How can faculty mentors balance guiding students while fostering their independence in research projects within a cohort model?
6. Where can Honors Colleges implement cohort- or community-based models outside of research opportunities?
7. What aspects of the Emerging Scholars Program model may be beneficial for your Honors College students and programming?

The background of the entire image is a repeating pattern of stylized green leaves and branches on a white background. The leaves are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, creating a lush, naturalistic feel.

CONGRATS!
YOU ALL HAVE
EMERGED



Published Paper:

Access our published paper "From Classroom to Community to Community: Enhancing Undergraduate Research Through an Interdisciplinary Cohort Model" by scanning the QR Code.