FYRE: First Year and Transfer Student Research Experience Program

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Project Budget:

$25,000

Abstract:

Undergraduate research is transformational. This project seeks to match faculty with historically excluded first year and transfer students who are interested in gaining mentored research or creative experiences. Students and faculty mentors will join learning communities to receive professional development and will be paid for their time.

For undergraduate students, the positive outcomes of engaging in research are numerous: increasing interest in graduate education, viewing oneself as a scientist or researcher, improving critical thinking and writing skills, increasing independence and creativity, and strengthening teamwork and communication skills. It is important to remove barriers and increase access to research opportunities. Considered a High Impact Practice (HIP) because it has the potential to positively impact learning outcomes, retention, and graduation, undergraduate research is particularly important for historically excluded students.

Unfortunately, studies show transfer students and students from historically excluded populations are less likely to participate in HIPs like student research for a variety of reasons. Barriers include lack of awareness of research opportunities and their benefits, perceived barriers of interaction with faculty, and personal and financial barriers. Additionally, while studies demonstrate the impact of these opportunities is greatest for students earlier in their college career, most students are offered these types of opportunities as upper year students. Transfer students face the additional barrier of a shorter time at the institution in which to develop relationships with faculty to obtain such opportunities.

To address these concerns, we are proposing a match program aimed at serving these populations. In early Fall 2022, interested faculty would submit an application which describes a research or creative project that would provide an immersive opportunity for at least one student to assist with the project in the Spring of 2023. Under the mentorship of the faculty member, students would be expected to work for 5-6 hours a week, for a total of 80-96 hours over the semester. These student research assistants will be paid, and each participating faculty member will receive a stipend for their time and labor.

The program administrators will evaluate and select faculty member projects. In mid-Fall 2022, the selected projects would be advertised to all first year and new transfer students, along with transfer students accepted for Spring 2023. Student applications will be evaluated by the program administrators and students will be notified of their selection by the end of Fall 2022.

Program administrators will also offer opportunities for community-building among the student researchers and faculty. Student researchers will attend an orientation meeting to review program expectations, connect with other students, and ask questions. Additional student meetings will occur throughout the program. Faculty mentors selected for the program will join a faculty learning community, examining best practices for mentoring new researchers and historically excluded students. At the end of the program, students will have the opportunity to present their experiences at a JMU sponsored symposium. Additionally, students will be able to apply for travel grant monies from the program to present the research at conferences outside of JMU. Program administrators will assess both student and faculty impacts and outcomes as a result of participating in the program.

This program is unique at JMU. The vast majority of the current funding for student research at JMU is provided by individual units, each with different budgets and priorities for funding. Some students, therefore, have more opportunities than others to engage in faculty-mentored research experiences. Funding this program will provide a level-playing field for students across units to apply for student funding. While this type of early career matching program exists at other institutions and even within units at JMU, few if any focus on historically excluded students. Combining early career matching programs with opportunities for professional development for faculty sets this program apart.

Project Budget Amount: $25,000

Personnel: $23,800

Administration: $1,200

Additional information to explain or expand on budgetary needs:

Students will work 5-6 hours/week on their projects over the course of the semester, in addition to a welcome session and programmatic check-ins. Participants will be encourged to engage in a final presentation of their work at a JMU or external conference. They will be paid a $1200 stipend for their work.

We intend to offer $500 stipends to each faculty mentor. Mentors will be required to submit a report detailing the work accomplished at the end of the experience.

$1700 per research team x 14 pairs = $23,800. We plan to use $1200 for as minimal programmatic support for orientation, evaluation, travel funding, and community-building events.