

ADDRESSING POLICY AREA FIVE: Illinois colleges and universities will be accountable for providing high quality academic programs and the systematic assessment of student learning outcomes while holding students to ever higher expectations for learning and growth.

Supporting Undergraduate Research

What issue or need is addressed by the effective practice?

As a highly selective college that promises individual attention to students, Illinois Wesleyan has an obligation to provide as wide a range of opportunities as possible for students to develop their capacities for scholarly and artistic work.

Description of the effective practice.

For over 15 years, the Illinois Wesleyan faculty and administration have devoted considerable attention to developing a wide variety of vehicles through which individual students can showcase their research and creative skills. In addition to required research seminars and/or juried exhibitions and performances for seniors—programs that exist at most colleges—Illinois Wesleyan offers a rich set of additional forums for outstanding student work. Several of these initiatives are open to all students, regardless of their research or artistic interests. The Research Honors Program, open to high-achieving students, requires students to develop a research or creative project and defend it before an interdisciplinary faculty committee. A successful defense results in an “Honors” designation on the student’s transcript. In addition, all students are eligible to participate in the John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference, held each April. The full-day, on-campus program features multiple poster sessions, oral presentations, art exhibitions, and musical and dramatic performances. Students from all disciplines are also eligible for travel funding from the Provost’s office to present their research or to perform in refereed off-campus conferences or exhibitions. There is also an active program on campus to identify promising applicants for Rhodes, Marshall, Fulbright, Truman, and other prestigious national and international fellowships.

Besides these general opportunities, academic departments support student research and artistic work in particular ways most suitable to the discipline. Each year, for example, many science faculty members are co-authors with students of one or more scholarly articles in professional journals. Other departments, mostly in the social sciences, sponsor student-edited, printed journals that publish outstanding work by IWU students; among these journals are the *Park Place Economist*, *Res Publica* (Political Science), *Constructing the Past* (History), and *Tributaries* (English). The Economics Department supports an additional on-line journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles from Economics students across the country. The Religion and Hispanic Studies departments organize regular on-campus colloquia at which students and faculty present their work for review and discussion by other students and faculty. The Philosophy department hosts student-managed undergraduate conference each spring in which students from other campuses travel to IWU to present and critique philosophical treatises. Nearly thirty academic honoraries are chartered on the campus, and many of these sponsor programs at which student members present their work to other outstanding students and faculty.

How does this practice achieve sustainability?

Because all these initiatives are department- or University-organized and have budget support from the University as well, the infrastructure exists to replicate them year after year; they are not subject to the constant re-learning curve to which programs sponsored by student organizations are subject. Furthermore, as participation in each of these programs grows, more advanced students serve as role models for younger students, encouraging them to develop their own research or artistic agendas for future years. Undergraduate research has thus become embedded in the campus culture.

What are the measurable outcomes?

It is possible to track the number of participants in these programs, and we have seen growth in them over time. For example, the Research Honors designations are typically awarded to 7-8% of graduating students, as was true for 2006 graduates; the 2006 John Wesley Powell Research Conference featured the work of 147 student researchers and artists (an all-time high). The Provost's Student Travel Fund helped 21 students present their work off-campus at academic conferences. We have found that many students who have participated in undergraduate research or creative activities are inspired to continue their education beyond the bachelor's level.