

## PILOT PROJECT 3

A collaboration between the Honors College, the Office of Inclusion and Diversity, and the undergraduate research fellowship program (Appendix K: Example Proposal)

## Project Overview + Summary ///

Stemming from a collaborative Ronald E. McNair Trio Grant (McNair Grant) proposal, this project aims to improve continuing education outcome success among low-income, first-generation, and underrepresented students. Data indicates that low-income and underrepresented students face barriers when seeking admission to graduate programs. Further, low-income and underrepresented students are less likely to complete a PhD and return to academia. The Office of Inclusion and Diversity (OID), the Honors College, and the Director of the Undergraduate Research Fellowship program propose the addition of undergraduate research fellowships for students in the target population. Academic Insight will support the project through analysis of university graduate outcome data, sponsoring the fellowships and providing analytic support for assessing the project impact. Project goals include understanding the effects of participation in undergraduate research on: post-graduation outcomes, preparedness to pursue continuing education, and the ability to articulate learning and experiences to relevant audiences.

## Project Initiation ///

A large group of faculty and staff met over a three-year period to prepare a McNair Grant for the Department of Education. This group included representatives from the Graduate School, OID, Honors College, faculty from multiple academic units (College of Education, College of Liberal Arts, College of Veterinary Medicine), the Director of the Undergraduate Research Fellowship program, and representatives from Academic Insight. Ultimately, the proposal was not selected for the final award; however, the initial data analysis and needs assessment pointed to an excellent opportunity to improve student success. As such, the project was submitted to the Bright Idea seed grant program.

## Specification of the Problem, Opportunity, and Target ///

Initial research conducted by Academic Insight and original submitters of the McNair Grant indicated that underrepresented students face greater challenges than their peers. They have lower GPAs and ACT scores at time of admission. Many of these students face financial barriers when completing their education. For example, 22% of McNair eligible students at the University (Pell-eligible, first-generation, and/or underrepresented) reported an annual household income below \$35k, compared to only 9.1% in the general student population. Underrepresented students also lack mentors and role models from demographically similar backgrounds because 77% of AU faculty identify as white or non-Hispanic.

Considering these challenges, it is no surprise that low-income, first-generation, and/or underrepresented students are 10% less likely than their counterparts to enroll in continuing education opportunities in the year following graduation, and that only 2.3% of Auburn University McNair-eligible graduates who enter a doctoral program attain their doctoral degree within 10 years.

However, research also indicates that the impact of engaging in undergraduate research on post-graduate success for these students is significant. With all other factors constant, the probability of success in securing graduate enrollment for nonwhite students significantly increases from 50.5% to 68.3% if they participate in undergraduate research. Therefore, encouraging undergraduate research therefore appears to be a unique opportunity for cultivating continuing education success among this group of students.

## Connections to AUBURNACHIEVE ///

Initial analyses conducted by Academic Insight identified both the target population (students whom identify as low-income, first-generation, or underrepresented) and the desired intervention of sponsoring undergraduate research fellowships. In alignment with the specified objectives of AUBURNACHIEVE, this project aims to understand the effect of participating in undergraduate research on underrepresented students' positive post-graduation outcomes, their preparedness to pursue continuing and professional education, and their opportunities to articulate their learning. As such, this project connects with Objectives 1 (career outcomes) and Objective 3 (articulation for student learning) of AUBURNACHIEVE, providing the opportunity to impact both graduates' success and their ability to articulate the value of their unique experiences.

## Current Status ///

The current status of this project is as follows:

- McNair Grant Committee formed, and analyses conducted by Academic Insight between 2019–2021
- McNair Grant submitted: early 2022
- Feedback received from the Department of Education; grant committee meets, discusses feedback, and identifies Bright Idea seed grant opportunity: mid-2022
- The Honors College, OID, and the Director of the Undergraduate Research Fellowship program collaborate to submit Bright Idea seed grant; the abstract is received and reviewed by the Insight Lab, Advisory Council, and Community of Practice: September 2022
- Feedback is shared with the submitting units, and the initial logistics meeting is scheduled, and budget details are discussed: November 2022

## Future Steps ///

Based upon current progress, the project team aims to complete the following:

- Begin sponsorship of 13 undergraduate research fellowships in the Fall 2023 semester
- Supplement research fellowships with professional development seminars and workshops and connect students with mentors and role models through a collaboration with OID and the Center for Career Discovery and Success
- Upon completion of the fellowships, and at time of graduation, assess the intervention's impact

## Assessment Plan ///

With sponsorship of undergraduate research fellowships for underrepresented students identified as the desired intervention, impact will be assessed using a number of indicators:

- Using the University's existing CEES, analyze the data to address the following questions: Has there been an increase in the percentage of students from historically underrepresented student groups participating in undergraduate research? Do these students report an increase in the quality of their undergraduate research experiences?
- According to the FDS and annually obtained National Student Clearinghouse data: Is there an increased number of students from the target group seeking continuing education? Are these students seeing an increased success rate for acceptance into a program of continuing education? Are these students satisfied with their enrollment outcome?
- Do students that participate in undergraduate research fellowships have higher articulation rubric scores than students that do not?