



Research Impacts Project

Documenting, Evaluating, and Valuing Impactful Research

National Summer Undergraduate Research Project

In the late spring of 2020, Dr. Michael Johnson, Associate Professor of Immunobiology in the College of Medicine, began recognizing an unanticipated effect of the COVID-19 pandemic: the temporary closure of undergraduate research programs that served minoritized students across the country. For the last decade, involvement in undergraduate research has been proven again and again to be a key factor affecting student persistence and success in STEM fields. Therefore, ensuring that there are opportunities for minoritized students to participate in undergraduate research is key to reducing disparities in STEM persistence and degree completion. With programs announcing closures for summer 2020, Dr. Johnson was concerned about what this would mean for minoritized students interested in STEM.

In response, he took to Twitter and mobilized his personal and professional networks to create the National Summer Undergraduate Research Project (NSURP) in just 11 days.

NSURP is a virtual summer research internship program that works to fill the gap in undergraduate research opportunities by providing opportunities for students to engage in research virtually. Participating students are paired with a research mentor and participate in research online/remotely, in addition to participating in an accompanying seminar series and professional development webinars.

In summer 2020, the program received over 600 applicants and was able to place over 250 undergraduate students from under-represented groups with 170 mentors. Since this time, the program has grown to serve over 350 students annually and has garnered funding from a number of internal (e.g., Provost Investment Fund, Office of Societal Impact) and external (e.g., Gates Foundation, National Science Foundation) funders, growing from \$0 in funding to over \$2 million in funding.

Dr. Johnson comments that developing NSURP provided a way for him to take the negative energy of the COVID pandemic and racial tensions surrounding the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and transform it into positive energy around a mission and focus to expand opportunities for minoritized students. But this did not come without sacrifice. As to be expected, launching a research program that serves hundreds of students annually is no easy or simple feat. Rather, it took immense dedication and time—time away from his family and his own research. And it also took professional sacrifice; Dr. Johnson even contemplated

delaying going up for tenure for a year in order to ensure he had the capacity to push forward this project, though thankfully this was not necessary.

While NSURP started as a personal project born of a commitment to advance equity and inclusion in STEM, as it has developed there are more and more opportunities for Dr. Johnson to integrate NSURP with his own research. For example, he has been able to identify and attract students to work in his lab through the program and fund their participation through National Science Foundation's post-baccalaureate program, a program he hopes to expand in coming years.

Dr. Johnson's work establishing NSURP demonstrates how a personal commitment to diversity and inclusion can ignite a national and international effort to expand access to undergraduate research. While this project started as a tangential effort alongside his academic research, the expansion of the program and its success identifying and training junior researchers shows the potential to feedback into Dr. Johnson's lab and advance his scientific research.

The Research Impacts Project, funded by the Provost's Investment Fund, aims to help UArizona researchers, administrators, and leaders collect, document, and communicate the societal impacts of their research to community partners, funders, and others interested in the work we do.



Societal Impact