

Undergraduate Research as a "High-Impact" Practice

The Association of American Colleges & Universities has identified undergraduate research as one of eleven "high-impact practices" that promote deep learning, student engagement, and student retention.¹

Assessing Our Impact

UCLA is unique in offering a center dedicated to undergraduate research in humanities, arts, social science, and behavioral science disciplines. The Undergraduate Research Center for the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (URC-HASS) offers research and scholarship programs, research courses, faculty and student workshops, individual mentoring, and presentation and publication opportunities.

Analysis of URC-HASS major (multi-quarter) research scholarship programs shows they support UCLA priorities in equity, diversity, and inclusion while building transferable academic skills, fostering personal development, cultivating community, and preparing students for careers.²

URC-HASS Support of Transfer and Underrepresented Minority Students

URC-HASS research scholarship programs support transfer students (Figure 1) and underrepresented minority (URM) students (Figure 2) at rates higher than campus representation.

The two leftmost columns in each figure show the difference between a) students participating in URC-HASS research programs and b) those enrolled in humanities, arts, social science, or behavioral science mentored research contracts, but not participating in URC-HASS research programs.³ The difference in distribution for both transfer and URM students across these two groups was significant ($p < .01$), with URC-HASS research programs engaging a greater number of transfer and URM students. The two rightmost columns in each figure compare URC-HASS research programs enrollment to c) the UCLA undergraduate student population distribution for humanities, arts, social science, and behavioral science majors (column 3) and d) all majors (column 4).⁴ Again, URC-HASS research programs engage transfer and URM students at rates higher than overall campus representation.⁵

Figure 1. Freshman and Transfer Student Admits

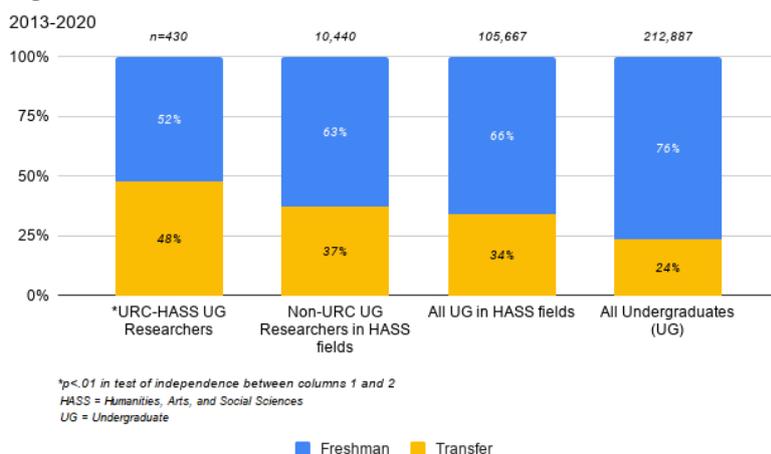
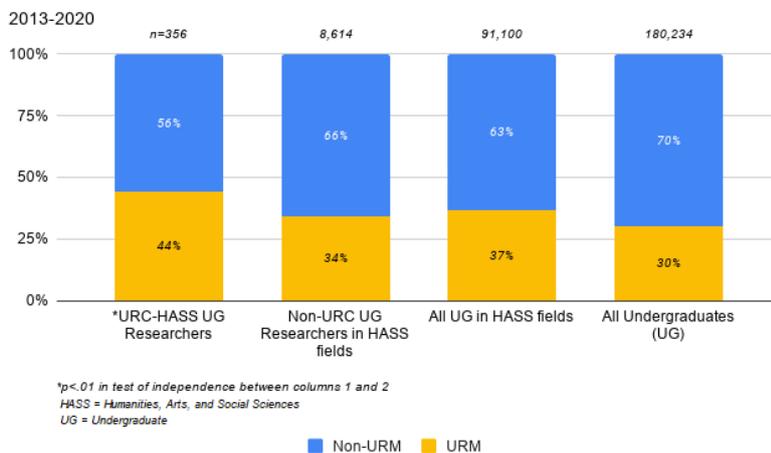


Figure 2. Underrepresented Minority (URM) and Non-URM domestic students



1. Kuh, George D, Carol Geary Schneider, and Association of American Colleges and Universities. 2008. High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
 2. Analysis conducted in collaboration with the UCLA Center for Educational Assessment. Programs assessed include the Undergraduate Research Fellows Program (URFP), Undergraduate Research Scholars Program (URSP), and Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) program. In each program, students complete an independent research project under the direction of a faculty mentor and with the support of URC-HASS resources.
 3. These two columns draw on registrar records of all unique students enrolled in SRP 99 or departmental 196-199 independent research contract courses in the humanities, arts, social sciences, or behavioral sciences from fall 2013 through spring 2020.
 4. These two columns draw on data from the UCLA Office of Academic Planning and Budget on the sum of enrollments from fall 2013 through spring 2020.
 5. Note that URM and non-URM measures are only taken using the domestic student population, not including students on F1 international student visas.

URC-HASS Research Program Outcomes

1. Program participants gain professional development and community.

Across URSP and URFP pre- and post-program surveys between 2013–2020, participants were significantly more likely ($p < .05$; matched pairs; $n=199$) to express stronger post-survey agreement with the following statements:

My research has allowed me to become a valued member of UCLA's research community.

My research has allowed me to develop a sense of community with faculty members and peers.

My research has allowed me to present at an academic conference and/or publish in an academic journal.

My research has helped me clarify my post-graduation plans.

The research program has made me more interested in research.

2. Program participants gain tangible research skills.

Across URSP and URFP pre- and post-program surveys between 2013–2020, participants were significantly more likely ($p < .01$; matched pairs; $n=199$) to report stronger post-survey proficiency in all research skills measured, including:

Developing a research question

Finding sources

Writing a research proposal

Conducting a literature review

Analyzing and synthesizing information

Developing an argument

Presenting findings/arguments in writing

Presenting findings/arguments orally

3. Program participants report higher proficiency in transferable career skills in comparison to peers who did not do research.

Using responses on the UCLA Senior Surveys 2014–2018 and compared to a quasi-control group of matched peers without undergraduate research experience, students in the URC-HASS's URFP or URSP programs ($n=156$) reported significantly ($p < .05$) higher levels on average of the following traits and competencies:

Critical thinking

Ability to make informed decisions that require analyzing information from many perspectives

Desire for lifelong learning

Ability to communicate effectively in writing

Academic ability

Drive to achieve

Select student responses regarding program benefits:

“ [The Program] helped me realize I was not just doing this work for myself, but for those I'd be sharing it with as well.”

“ I do not think I would have been able to manage my first research project on my own without the help and support of this program. Additionally, I don't know how I would have been able to cover my costs of attending UCLA without the financial scholarship support of this program.”

“ URSP provided me both with funding to make devoting a great deal of time to research viable, and supplied accountability that I sorely needed... Moreover, I cannot overstate the value of knowing that my research topic was considered worthy of investment.”

“ Being able to articulate and communicate my research to a wide audience helped me figure out how to do so effectively by emphasizing the most meaningful and impactful parts of my work in accessible terms.”

URC-HASS Program Funding

Funding for the URFP and URSP programs is provided by donors. Funding for the MMUF program is provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.