

Engaging Undergraduate Learners

Historically, Baylor University has considered undergraduate education to be its primary mission. While continuing to emphasize a strong undergraduate education, Baylor has grown into a major university incorporating professional schools, graduate degrees, and scholarly research. In 2006, the Carnegie Foundation reclassified Baylor as a research institution with high research activity. Now, Baylor can further strengthen its commitment to undergraduate education by immersing undergraduates in the active learning environments associated with a research university. This QEP focuses on two of Baylor's signature strengths, its longstanding commitment to transforming students through a well-rounded, liberal arts undergraduate curriculum and its new commitment to scholarly inquiry and research. The plan has two interrelated and complementary components:

With the first initiative, Engaged Learning Groups (ELGs), Baylor is applying current research in student learning and engagement to the first two years of the undergraduate curriculum. Designed specifically to take advantage of the Baylor faculty's expertise and Baylor students' interests and experiences, ELGs are innovative, meant to help students and faculty re-imagine the possibilities for engaging together in sustained learning experiences. Each year, new ELGs will invite students to explore specially selected disciplinary or interdisciplinary topics for at least three semesters with a team of talented and learning-centered faculty members.

The second initiative, the Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Achievement (URSA), builds on existing institutional strengths to help more students find opportunities to engage in research, beginning early in their undergraduate careers. If learning communities will increase student-faculty interaction and challenge new students, supervised research should magnify and expand this effect across a broad spectrum of learning environments. Research increases the level of challenge and keeps students who might become restless in standard lectures engaged and focused. Students become partners in the scholarly adventure, rather than a mere audience. Each component of the URSA initiative, the Research Resources Website, Scholars' Day, the small grants program, and writing awards, helps to create an undergraduate learning environment that fosters those relationships.

The ELG program invites broad-based participation, challenging faculty to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries and develop unique and engaging learning experiences for new students through their first two years. The URSA program invites faculty and undergraduate students from all academic units to participate in one of the central activities of the University – scholarly research. We are confident that this QEP will enhance Baylor's undergraduate programs by implementing innovative best practices that increase student participation in the university's communities of inquiry and increase student engagement with their own learning.

For more information, contact:

Tiffany Hogue, J.D.
Assistant Provost
Tiffany_Hogue@baylor.edu