

MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY'S
Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)
Enhancing Undergraduate Research Endeavors and Creative Activities (EURECA)

QEP Executive Summary

Undergraduate research has been a significant part of Midwestern State University's (MSU) culture for many years. Thus, our QEP is MSU's plan to extend the existing foundations of undergraduate research that are already in place and set in motion a process to achieve the overarching goal: To enhance the opportunity for students to engage in research with faculty guidance. To accomplish that goal, MSU proposed **Enhancing Undergraduate Research Endeavors and Creative Activities (EURECA)** as the program to forward this initiative.

The development of the QEP began early in 2010 with the appointment of a committee to initiate the process of selecting a topic for the QEP. The committee was comprised of 15 members representing a broad cross-section of the campus community, including the faculty, student body, administration, staff, alumni, and the MSU Board of Regents. The committee implemented two web-based surveys to ensure broad-based participation in the topic-selection process.

The results of the surveys did not reveal a clear mandate, so further steps were undertaken to identify and refine the QEP topic including additional discussions with faculty, students, and administrators. A convergence of several factors resulted in the selection of undergraduate research as the topic. MSU's positive experience with the Undergraduate Research Opportunities and Summer Workshop (UGROW) suggested a viable model. In addition, success with several student research forums supported a QEP topic that incorporated a platform for research presentations. Further, the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC), of which MSU is a member university, was supporting undergraduate research as a valuable component of a liberal arts education. A review of the literature also suggested that undergraduate research can be a very effective means of improving student recruitment, student engagement, and the development of critical thinking skills. Finally, undergraduate research was consistent with MSU's mission and the recommendations outlined in our Strategic Master Plan completed in June 2012.

The Office of Undergraduate Research was created in January 2013 to implement EURECA. Three objectives were identified: (1) Promote research collaboration between faculty and students, and between students and their peers both inside and from different disciplines, to enhance the educational experience, (2) Provide accessibility for all students to learn basic research skills, and (3) Provide students opportunities for improvement and implementation of visual, oral, and written communication skills through the vehicle of an Undergraduate Research Forum.

A number of mechanisms are being used to accomplish these objectives. Funding was provided for research involving faculty and undergraduate students beginning in the fall of 2013. The first call for proposals was in late spring 2013. A mentoring framework was put in place in which graduate students enrolled in a thesis course could submit proposals to mentor undergraduate students. This created a mentoring process involving a faculty member, graduate student, and undergraduate student. Existing courses on research methods have been reviewed and new courses are being created to strengthen the preparation of undergraduate students in the foundations of research. Finally, an Undergraduate Research Forum for presenting research will be conducted each long semester with the first one in fall 2013.

The success of EURECA will be assessed by a variety of measures: (1) faculty and students' collaboration in research (measured by the number of proposals, presentations, publications, and creative works), (2) students' perceptions of student-faculty interactions, and (3) students' research, critical thinking, and communication skills. The QEP Assessment Team (AT) will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the program and provide recommendations for continuous improvement each year.

We believe that our QEP will enhance undergraduate education at MSU. It is an evidenced-based effort that has demonstrated efficacy elsewhere. Our experience with UGROW and our history of undergraduate research indicates a fertile foundation for success. Finally, the QEP aligns with our mission as a liberal arts university and our Strategic Master Plan, ensuring an ongoing institutional commitment.

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