DRAFT

White Paper and Preliminary Plan for Institutionalizing and Enhancing Undergraduate Student Research at Nazareth College

Executive Summary
(As distributed at Faculty Assembly Day, 24 August 2011)

In Fall 2010 the VPAA charged a group of faculty volunteers from all four schools and colleges to form a Working Group on Undergraduate Research. The primary task for this Working Group was to explore ways for promoting and supporting undergraduate student research, scholarship, and creative activity throughout the college by: 1) building on and expanding the work already being done and 2) doing so in ways that brought enrichment not just to a few individuals but to the community as a whole. Another goal was to render such work more visible while amplifying its intensity and impact.

A first step toward these goals has been the generation of a document (White Paper draft) that could begin to highlight best practices and as well as some of the issues and constraints that might affect such progress. The White Paper also outlines a one-year plan for first steps toward amplification and enrichment of the undergraduate research agenda at Nazareth.

The Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) defines Undergraduate Research as: "An inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline." Recently, CUR has been working to broaden the definition and encourage participation in all disciplines. With this definition in mind, the group began with questions such as: What does undergraduate student research at Nazareth College presently look like? What have been its benefits to students, to faculty, to the institution as a whole? How do the challenges it poses and the forms that it takes vary on discipline or academic level? What currently supports such activity? What obstacles presently exist?

From these early discussions and participation in AACU's conference on *Creativity, Inquiry, and Discovery: Undergraduate Research in and Across the Curriculum* in Durham, NC in November 2010 it became clear that:

1)   The present state of undergraduate research varied considerably throughout the College. Some departments had UR programs firmly in place while others were only beginning to imagine the possibilities.

2)   Undergraduate research was one form of experiential learning/high impact practice that could favorably affect student learning and was related to

our new Core curriculum. But it was also acknowledge that it might not suit all disciplines/majors equally.

3) Two fundamentally different goals could be served by focusing on undergraduate research:
   a. Infusing research skills and experiences broadly throughout the curriculum to reach all students.
   b. Providing in-depth "high impact" research experiences for a select group of students, either by providing them with the opportunity to work on a faculty member's ongoing project (as either co-investigator or assistant) or design their own project with faculty mentoring

4) Clarifying which of these goals for would best suit a particular unit or situation was a critical first step.

5) A number of different factors could reasonably affect which goal(s) was appropriate.

6) Factors that might affect which model would work in a department included but were not limited to: a) the intellectual traditions of a discipline and/or b) the market realities of a major.

7) It would be important for departments to decide if and where UR fit in their curriculum and what the nature of that activity would be.

8) One size clearly would not fit all, nor did it make sense to mandate the infusion of research into all programs or curricula.

9) The pending implementation process for the new Core, which seeks to enhance opportunities for integrative investigations, may well also positively affect the research and integrative experience for all students.

10) Although it would be up to departments to decide where to place emphasis and what the balance between the two goals would be, we would also need an institutional plan and process that could coherently document what was being done as well as provide for equitable and democratic distribution of resources while allowing simultaneously for both a broadly based infusion approach as well the more familiar enrichment models.

Several things will be critical to the success of this initiative. Although early adopters needed to be provided for, the working group as a whole felt strongly that if Nazareth supports those who see its value, that support will be repaid through the kinds of student learning that are fostered and as well as a growing interest among other faculty. Mandating undergraduate research simply did not seem to be required.

Second, given the potential of undergraduate student research to provide paybacks for faculty as well as students, the hope is that such growth will be exponential. However, before that can happen, it will be essential that undergraduate research activity be viewed as a legitimate activity that integrates teaching and learning and thus is valued as a reasonable means to attain recognition (i.e., promotion and tenure). In short, to be able to reach a goal of enhancing and expanding undergraduate research at Nazareth, the activity would need to count for both the faculty and students in meaningful and measurable ways. Students might receive course credit, partial-tuition rebates, a small stipend/award, or work study assignments for their involvement in a project. Faculty might receive workload reassignments or summer grant stipends to develop a viable research agenda that might involve students.

Further, some common metric would need to be developed (other than simply the number of students involved) that could be used as a basis for faculty reassignments. Such a metric would need to ensure that compensation and support is comparable to that provided for teaching a summer course or other types of workload reassignments and releases. Possible things to consider might be include the potential for sustainability as well as the nature of the deliverables that could result.

Special funding opportunities might also be offered that would encourage faculty to either investigate an area of scholarship that could be used as a basis for engaging students actively in an ongoing scholarly investigation or creative process, either as a co-investigator or apprentice/assistant depending on the discipline and/or nature of the work. And such work should be cataloged as supporting scholarship, teaching, and possibly service depending on the type of project involved.

Creating a system for recognizing student as well as faculty work was also generally viewed as vitally important and the key to the long-term success of the initiative, but whatever system was created would need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate the specifics of individual departments or schools. It also became clear that how we refer to the initiative would be important so that we would be sure to welcome all rather than exclude. Increasingly it has become the practice nationally to refer to the process not as "undergraduate student research" but as "undergraduate research/scholarship/and creative activities."

Finally, it seemed clear that we would need a plan for encouraging and supporting undergraduate research throughout the institution. A review of how this had been accomplished elsewhere suggested that key elements of such a plan needed to include: 1) clearly articulated and highly visible curricular goals; 2) an institutional commitment of funding and time to the initiative; and 3) a mechanism for sharing and recognition.

Critical to the success of such plan has been the *commitment from the VPAA of catalyst funding above and beyond what is presently available.* The level of funding for each department and degree-granting program has been set at $500 (that would include student travel to conferences as well as other initiatives) with an additional $500 being made available for departments with more than 20 students and/or those with more ambitious projects.

Departments that take advantage of the funding would be required to submit an assessment report detailing: 1) what they had done; 2) how it had supported student learning; 3) the nature of the specific learning outcomes that had been the result; and 4) what they as a department had learned from the process.

This information would in turn be used to create a directory of current practices and ultimately would as help to articulate more clearly those activities and programs that fit most naturally with the Nazareth culture and values and thus should become a part of an institutional schedule for future funding. From these data, the next task for the Working Group would be to develop a taxonomy for future funding.

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