Fostering a Culture of Student Scholarship

Vision and focus:
Mason has a strong emphasis on faculty-driven research and creative activity, but a culture of student scholarship remains to be created across the university. In this context, student scholarship is taken to mean research and creative activities that require active student participation to generate new knowledge or create new works. Examples of such activities might include creative discovery and expression in one’s discipline, interdisciplinary exploration, being able to evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources, or finding new applications of current knowledge. The goal of this initiative is to create a pervasive culture of student scholarship, beginning in the freshman year at Orientation, and moving through increasingly sophisticated steps to the senior year. This will make it evident to all members of the Mason community that students are actively engaged in scholarship and it will invigorate and excite faculty and students, leading to deeper engagement in research and creative activity throughout the university.

Along with the expansion of discipline-specific, faculty-mentored research, students will be able to initiate their own projects or engage in creative opportunities that cross disciplinary, curricular, and co-curricular boundaries. Students participating in research and creative activities inevitably become part of a community of lifelong learners, generating opportunities to discuss and explore ideas with peers and with those more advanced in the discipline.

Student learning outcomes:
1. Students will recognize the features of critical thinking in disciplinary contexts in order to develop their understanding of research methodologies and scholarly processes in specific disciplines.
2. Students will analyze research or theoretical articles in their field as evaluated by those knowledgeable in the content area.
3. Students will be able to apply the ideas of their discipline/field to communities outside their classrooms.
4. Students will be able to create an original work (in any appropriate format) about a topic in their field demonstrating evidence of critical review, analysis, and synthesis of others’ works as evaluated by those knowledgeable in the content area.
5. Students will be able to articulate the central idea of their research/creative projects through increased opportunities for scholarly and non-scholarly presentations and publications.
6. Students will understand, adopt, and develop appropriate means of argument through the use of rhetoric, source materials, and conventions of citation in the area of their scholarship, should their scholarship lend itself to evaluation in these areas.
7. Students will be able to communicate about their scholarly work through experiences that encourage one or more of the following: a) collaboration with other student-authors; b) collaboration with and/or outreach to groups or communities outside the university; c) integration of cross-disciplinary information; and d) communicating across cultural and/or national borders.
8. Students will be able to identify and assess the validity of key assumptions and ethical dimensions of a research/creative project in their field/discipline.

Possible avenues for implementation:
- Identify potential research or creative opportunities and expand them to include additional students, either as individuals or groups.
- Create research and creative activities in departments where they do not currently exist.
- Expand the Innovations research symposium to include research and creative activities from all levels and departments in the university.
- Encourage collaborative opportunities among students, faculty, and academic units to foster more dynamic research and creative activities in areas that cross several fields.
- Develop living-learning communities that support a culture of student scholarship.

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