Research Experience for Undergraduates in Mathematics
Summer 2014

Survey of Program Participants

Center for Social Sciences and Public Policy Research
Missouri State University

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Center for Social Sciences and Public Policy Research

Background of the Study

The Center for Social Sciences and Public Policy Research (CSSPPR) at Missouri State University was contracted by the Mathematics Department at Missouri State University to conduct a survey of participants in the Summer 2014 “Research Experience for Undergraduates in Mathematics Program.” This report is the third (and final) in a three-year series designed to provide program administrators and staff with periodic, objective feedback from program participants concerning their satisfaction with program goals and services and to measure the students’ perceptions of the quality of the REU experience. The major purposes of this study are to assess the effectiveness of the program in meeting program objectives and to identify problems encountered by the participants. The survey responses were collected anonymously through questionnaires. The survey questions focused on the stated goals of the REU program and mentor interaction. In addition, there were several open-ended questions that allowed the participants to provide comments/opinions on program elements that they felt needed change or improvement. Data was collected at two points in the summer program – during Week 1 and Week 8. This report includes the findings from both weeks, as well as some comparative data between the two. In addition, this report includes a comparison of Week 8 results from all three years – 2012, 2013, and 2014.

On June 11, 2014, the CSSPPR Director met with participants enrolled in the REU program, and the Week 1 questionnaire was administered to the group (see Appendix A for the survey instrument). Initial results from the Week 1 survey were e-mailed to the Program Coordinator in the following week. Then on July 30, 2014, the Week 8 questionnaire was administered by the CSSPPR Director to all REU students (see Appendix B for the survey instrument). The data were analyzed during the first part of August, 2014, and the results are summarized in this report.

During both time periods, data were solicited from the entire population of participants (N=9), and all REU students completed the questionnaires so there is no sampling error
in the percentage breakdowns for each question. The response rate for the Week 1 and Week 8 surveys is 100%.

In the detailed analysis following the Executive Summary, the results of the two Summer 2014 surveys are presented in the order the questions were asked. For the open-ended questions, responses are shown as submitted by the respondent and have not been edited.

For the last part of this report, a comparison of Week 8 results for the three funded years (2012, 2013, and 2014) are presented to provide a summary of the success of this summer program.
Executive Summary

- Participants in the 2014 Research Experience for Undergraduates in Mathematics program at Missouri State University expressed overall satisfaction with the program, and the level of satisfaction increased over the course of the summer. During Week 1, 56% of the students responded that they were “very satisfied” with the program, and 44% responded “somewhat satisfied” (N=9). During Week 8, the percentages reflected that 89% were “very satisfied” and 11% were “somewhat satisfied” (N=9). The final survey revealed that all students were happy with the REU program.

- At the beginning of the program, nearly all respondents were either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the housing accommodations (100%), meals (89%), and the academic facilities (100%). Most of the students also reported that they were “very much” looking forward to weekend activities (56%).

- Most students were satisfied with their assigned faculty mentor in both Week 1 and Week 8 evaluations. During Week 1, six students reported that they were “very satisfied” with their faculty mentor (67%), and three students reported that they were “somewhat satisfied” (33%). During Week 8, seven students said that they were “very satisfied” with their faculty mentor (78%), and two students were “somewhat satisfied” (11%). All participants also expressed satisfaction regarding the availability and quality of interaction with their mentor. In addition, they all reported feeling comfortable with their research topic.

- The majority of participants (78%) felt that the program orientation was “very much” thorough and easy to understand, with the remaining 22% responding “somewhat.” When asked during the first week if they had a good idea of what the remaining research activities involved, 67% answered “somewhat” and 33% said “very much.”

- As a result of their participation in the REU program, there was an increase in students’ confidence about pursuing graduate education from Week 1 to Week 8. During the first
week of the REU program, no participants responded “much more confident” in pursuing graduate education, while two students felt “much more confident” in Week 8 (22%). Two students were “somewhat more confident” after the first week of the program (22%), and the number increased to four (45%) at the end of the program. Two students reported “somewhat less confident” during the first time period (22%), and the number dropped to one in Week 8 (11%).

- All participants felt that the REU program at Missouri State University met its stated goals. The following percentage of students responded “very much” to the program goals of being intellectually stimulating (89%), stimulating creativity (44%), promoting independent thinking (56%), and advancing their knowledge and understanding of mathematics (78%).

- The majority of participants who completed the Week 8 survey found the interaction with other students to be “very” rewarding (56%). Likewise, all students reported feeling a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program; 89% responded “very much” and 11% responded “somewhat” to this question.

- When asked how strongly they would recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others, 89% said “very much” and 11% said “somewhat.”

- The most commonly cited benefits of the program provided by the participants included (1) the opportunity as an undergraduate student to work with a professor mentor on a research project, and (2) the REU experience broadened the student’s knowledge in mathematics and mathematical research.

- The 2014 REU students offered few suggestions for program improvement. Two students mentioned that they would have liked to have more information before the program started, but this year’s evaluation suggests that few modifications are needed in the program in future years. Overall, the students who completed the surveys were satisfied with their experience in the REU program at Missouri State University.
A comparison of results from the three-year program indicates that the REU program in mathematics as Missouri State University has been successful. In summary, the undergraduate students have found the program to be a worthwhile and learning experience. A number of them have reported an increased interest in graduate study. It is also obvious from examining the survey results over the three year period that the program administrators have taken the student comments seriously. Each year improvements were made to remedy student concerns.
Responses to Week 1 Survey Questions (in Percentages)

1. **How would you describe your overall level of satisfaction so far with the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program?**

All participants were either “very satisfied” (56%) or “somewhat satisfied” (44%) with the REU program after Week 1. (N=9)
2. **How satisfied are you with your housing accommodations, the meals provided, the academic facilities, and your assigned faculty mentor?**

During the first week of the program, REU students were satisfied with their housing accommodations, meals, the academic facilities, and their assigned faculty mentor. The students responded “very satisfied” with housing accommodations (44%), with meals (33%), with academic facilities (89%), and with their faculty mentor (67%). The students responded “somewhat satisfied” with housing accommodations (56%), with meals (56%), with academic facilities (11%), and with their faculty mentor (33%). Only one student was “somewhat dissatisfied” with meals during the first week. (N=9)
3. Are you looking forward to the weekend activities?

All of the REU participants reported looking forward to weekend activities; 56% responded “very much,” and 44% said “somewhat.” (N=9)
4. **Do you feel that the program orientation was thorough and easy to understand?**

The majority of respondents (78%) felt that the orientation was “very” thorough and easy to understand, while 22% responded “somewhat.” (N=9)

5. **If you are dissatisfied in some way with the meals or other elements of the program, please let us know the primary source of your dissatisfaction or let us know what could be done to correct the problem.**

Students offered the following open-ended responses for this question:

*We all seem to have had some trouble getting our meal plans/Boomer Bucks to work, but I am satisfied with everything.*

*We are unable to get boomer meals onto our bear pass cards, perhaps because we are not taking any credit classes.*

*It would be nice to have housing with kitchens, although the campus dining facilities are fine for just two months.*

*I am having trouble purchasing a meal plan through the website. It will not allow me to purchase a plan. Also a take-out option would be great.*

*It’s pretty hard to cook in the dorms, but I know there’s not too much that can be done about that.*
5. cont.

*As of right now we are not able to purchase a meal plan.
*I think we could have been better informed about the housing accommodations. That is, it would have been useful to know that the dorms were totally empty.
*The only issue with the housing is that we have no kitchen, but it is not a major problem since there is a kitchen all the way in the basement. Meal plans have yet to be able to be purchased. We don’t know what the issue is yet.

6. Do you feel that you have a good idea at this time of what the remaining research activities will involve?

Most of the students had a good idea of what the remaining research activities involved; 33% responded “very much,” and 67% said “somewhat.” (N=9)
7. After attending the first week of the REU program, do you feel more or less confident in pursuing graduate education?

During Week 1, the largest percentage of students (56%) felt “about the same” about pursuing graduate education, while 22% responded “somewhat more confident” and 22% responded “somewhat less confident.” (N=9)
Responses to Week 8 Survey Questions (in Percentages)

8. How would you describe your overall level of satisfaction with the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program?

The participants in the Summer 2014 REU program expressed a high level of overall satisfaction with the program during both Week 1 and Week 8. (N=9)
9. **What do you feel were the primary benefits of attending the REU program?**

All nine participants answered this question. Their open-ended responses included:

* - Learning how mathematical research works
  - Learning to work with a team of students on collaborative projects
  - Figuring out if graduate school is a good fit for me

*The primary benefits of REU were for me twofold. First, I was exposed to new mathematical ideas, which enhanced my overall understanding of certain topics. Our schedule was guided enough but also gave us the freedom to figure things out at my own pace. The other benefit was getting to know fellow math students from all around the US, both professionally and personally.*

* - Exactly what I thought they would be – I got a taste of research, which was both rewarding and encouraging. I also became more familiar with the branches of math that our group studied, which I hope will be helpful in my classes this fall.*

* - Uninterrupted work on a single problem
  - Both succeeding and failing with both group members and mentor
  - Interesting, substantial math being done
  - See how other schools/people approach math
  - Social interactions with other math majors
  - See/explore new area

* - Experience doing math research in a friendly, low-pressure environment with some independence
  - Exposure to a math department at a different university
  - Generous stipend
  - Exploring Springfield restaurants and sights

*Getting experience in applied math and a feel for research before applying to graduate programs. This program helped me to better understand the direction/field I hope to pursue in the future.*

*I learned real life applications of mathematics, and learned much more math in general. It was a great experience and further encouraged me to go into a mathematical job field.*

* - Research experience
  - Financial help
  - Connections

* - Research experience at undergraduate level
  - Interaction with faculty and graduate students
  - Participation in MAKO conference
  - Free coffee and many fun social events
10. **After completing the REU program, do you feel more or less confident in pursuing graduate education?**

The responses to this question show that as a result of their REU experience most students reported feeling some level of confidence in pursuing graduate education: 22% said “much more confident” and 45% said “somewhat more confident.” The REU experience contributed to only one student (11%) feeling “somewhat less confident” about pursuing graduate education. (N=9)
11. How satisfied were you with your assigned faculty mentor, the availability of your mentor, and the quality of interaction with your mentor?

All students reported having a satisfied experience with their faculty mentor. Students reported being “very satisfied” with their assigned faculty mentor (78%), the availability of their mentor (78%), and the quality of interaction with their mentor (56%). Other responses on these questions were answered “somewhat satisfied.” (N=9)
12. How comfortable were you with your research topic?

Students indicated that they were “very comfortable” (33%) or “somewhat comfortable” (67%) with their research topic. (N=9)
13. Please indicate the degree to which the REU program achieved its stated goals?

The participants clearly felt that the REU program achieved its stated goals—being intellectually stimulating (89% answered “very much”), stimulating creativity (44% answered “very much”), promoting independent thinking (56% answered “very much”), and advanced their knowledge and understanding of mathematics (78% answered “very much”). Other responses on these questions were “somewhat” for the four REU goals. (N=9)
14. To what degree did you find interaction with the other students rewarding?

The REU participants found interaction with the other students to be “very much” rewarding (56%) or “somewhat” rewarding (44%). (N=9)
15. To what degree do you feel a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program?

All of the REU students felt a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program; 89% answered “very much,” and one student (11%) said “somewhat.” (N=9)
16. **How strongly would you recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others?**

All respondents indicated that they would recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others; 89% answered “very much,” and 11% said “somewhat.” (N=9)
17. **Do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?**

Eight REU participants answered this open-ended question. Their comments included:

*-Program could be longer
-Smaller groups
-Workshops for applying to graduate school
*Beforehand, tell the REU participants more of what to expect during the program.
*The only suggestion that I could make is to have more information prior to arriving. I had no idea that to expect as far as both research and living was concerned. More info on dorms, other people attending, day-to-day work, etc.
*It’s a bit frustrating to have to spend so much money on low-quality campus food. Housing with a kitchen would have been a big improvement (although I don’t believe MSU has on-campus housing with kitchens). Otherwise, the program was fantastic.
*Perhaps physical poster presentations (in addition to ppt. presentations?) to teach poster creation and organization skills while allowing participants to participate in poster conferences.
*I felt that the algebra project could have been more exciting. After a while, the techniques and strategies we used to solve problems grew repetitive. I think that a project with more diversified problems would have been more enjoyable for me.
*Not really – it was a pretty good experience overall.
*I do not; it has been a terrific summer and I’m very grateful to have been involved with REU.
Comparison of 2012, 2013, and 2014 Week 8 Results (in percentages)

18. How would you describe your overall level of satisfaction with the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program?

The level of participant satisfaction with the REU program improved over the 3-year period. The vast majority of students (89%) reported being “very satisfied” with the program in 2013 and 2014. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
After completing the REU program, do you feel more or less confident in pursuing graduate education?

The responses to this question over the 3-year period show that as a result of their REU experience many students reported feeling some level of increased confidence in pursuing graduate education. In 2012 42.8% of the participants answered “much more confident” or “somewhat more confident.” In 2013 89% of the students responded “much more confident” or “somewhat more confident,” and in 2014 67% answered “much more confident” or somewhat more confident.” (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
20. **How satisfied were you with your assigned faculty mentor?**

Over the 3-year period, students reported an increased satisfaction with their faculty mentor. In 2014 all students responded either “very satisfied” (78%) or “somewhat satisfied” (22%). (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
21. **How satisfied were you with the availability of your mentor?**

Over the 3-year period, there was increased satisfaction with mentor availability. In 2014 all students responded either “very satisfied” (78%) or “somewhat satisfied” (22%). (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
22. **How satisfied were you with the quality of interaction with your mentor?**

Over the 3-year period, most participants were satisfied with the quality of interaction with their mentor. In 2014 all students responded “very satisfied” (56%) or “somewhat satisfied” (44%). (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
23. **How comfortable were you with your research topic?**

In 2012 one participant (14.3%) reported that they felt “somewhat uncomfortable” with their research topic. All other participants in the three years of this program said that they were “very comfortable” or “somewhat comfortable” with their research topics. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
24. **Please indicate the degree to which the REU program was intellectually stimulating.**

The majority of participants in all three years felt that the REU program achieved its stated goal of being intellectually stimulating. In the first year, 57% of the students answered “very much,” while 78% in 2013 and 89% in 2014 answered “very much.” The REU program clearly met this goal. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
25. Please indicate the degree to which the REU program stimulated your creativity.

The majority of participants in all three years felt that the REU program achieved its stated goal of stimulating creativity. The responses were similar in 2012 and 2014 with all students responding either “very much” or “somewhat.” The REU program met this goal. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
26. Please indicate the degree to which the REU program promoted independent thinking.

Nearly all participants in the three years felt that the REU program achieved its stated goal of promoting independent thinking. The most common response was “very much” (71.4% in 2012; 67% in 2013; and 56% in 2014). The REU program met this goal. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
27. Please indicate the degree to which the REU program advanced your knowledge and understanding of mathematics.

All but one student (in 2013) felt that the REU program achieved its stated goal of advancing their knowledge and understanding of mathematics. The vast majority of students replied “very much” (85.7% in 2012; 67% in 2013; and 78% in 2014). The REU program clearly met this goal. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
28. **To what degree did you find interaction with the other students rewarding?**

With the exception of one student (in 2013), the REU participants found interaction with the other students to be “very much” rewarding or “somewhat” rewarding. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
29. To what degree do you feel a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program?

Nearly all of the students who participated in this program over the three years felt a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program; 71.4% answered “somewhat” in 2012; and 67% and 89% answered “very much” in 2013 and 2014 respectively. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
30. **How strongly would you recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others?**

With the exception of one student (in 2013), all REU participants in the three programs indicated that they would recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others: 42.9% answered “very much” in 2012; 78% answered “very much” in 2013; and 89% answered “very much” in 2014. (N=7 in 2012; N=9 in 2013; N=9 in 2014)
Appendix A

Week 1 Survey Instrument and Letter of Introduction

Greetings REU students! The Center for Social Sciences and Public Policy Research here at Missouri State University is conducting an evaluation of the Research Experience for Undergraduates Grant Program, as required by the grant providers. As part of the evaluation, we are soliciting anonymous feedback from program participants now, as well as at the end of the summer semester, in order to assess your satisfaction with the various elements of the program and obtain valuable feedback and suggestions for making improvements. Although your participation is voluntary, opinions from all participants will give us the most accurate account of overall satisfaction among program participants. This survey is totally anonymous and confidential. No identifiers whatsoever will be used.

We thank you very much for taking the time to answer these few questions regarding your experiences so far with the program.

Dr. Lorene H. Stone – CSSPPR Director

Please select one response for each question.

1. How would you describe your overall level of satisfaction so far with the “Research Experience for Undergraduates Program?”
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

2. How satisfied are you with your housing accommodations?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied
3. How satisfied are you with the meals provided?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

4. How satisfied are you with the academic facilities (classrooms, computers, etc.)?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

5. How satisfied are you with your assigned faculty mentor?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

6. Are you looking forward to the weekend activities?
   - Very Much
   - Somewhat
   - Not Really
   - Not At All

7. Do you feel that the program orientation was thorough and easy to understand?
   - Very Much
   - Somewhat
   - Not Really
   - Not At All
8. If you are dissatisfied in some way with the meals or other elements of the program, please let us know the primary source of your dissatisfaction or let us know what could be done to correct the problem.

9. Do you feel that you have a good idea at this time of what the remaining research activities will involve?
   - Very Much
   - Somewhat
   - Not Really
   - Not At All

10. After attending the first week of the REU program, do you feel more or less confident in pursuing graduate education?
    - Much More Confident
    - Somewhat More Confident
    - About The Same
    - Somewhat Less Confident
    - Much Less Confident

Thank you for completing this survey!!

Have a great summer here at MSU!
Greetings REU students! The Center for Social Sciences and Public Policy Research is conducting the exit survey for the evaluation of the Research Experience for Undergraduates Grant Program, as required by the grant providers. As in Week One, we are soliciting anonymous feedback from program participants in order to assess your satisfaction with the various elements of the program and obtain valuable feedback and suggestions for making improvements. Although your participation is voluntary, opinions from all participants will give us the most accurate account of overall satisfaction among program participants. This survey is totally anonymous and confidential. No identifiers whatsoever will be used.

We thank you very much for taking the time to answer these few questions regarding your experiences with the program.

Dr. Lorene H. Stone – CSSPPR Director

Please select one response for each question.

1. How would you describe your overall satisfaction with the “Research Experience for Undergraduates Program?” Would you say that you are:

   o Very Satisfied
   o Somewhat Satisfied
   o Somewhat Dissatisfied
   o Very Dissatisfied

2. What do you feel were the primary benefits of attending the REU program?
3. After completing the REU program, do you feel more or less confident in pursuing graduate education?
   - Much More Confident
   - Somewhat More Confident
   - About the Same
   - Somewhat Less Confident
   - Much Less Confident

4. How satisfied are you with your assigned faculty mentor? Would you say that you are:
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

5. How satisfied were you with the availability of your mentor?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

6. How satisfied were you with the quality of interaction with your mentor?
   - Very Satisfied
   - Somewhat Satisfied
   - Somewhat Dissatisfied
   - Very Dissatisfied

7. How comfortable were you with your research topic?
   - Very Comfortable
   - Somewhat Comfortable
   - Somewhat Uncomfortable
   - Very Uncomfortable
Please indicate the degree to which the REU program achieved the following goals?

8. The program was intellectually stimulating.
   - Very Much
   - Somewhat
   - Not Much At All

9. The program stimulated my creativity.
   - Very Much
   - Somewhat
   - Not Much At All

10. The program promoted independent thinking.
    - Very Much
    - Somewhat
    - Not Much At All

11. The program advanced my knowledge and understanding of mathematics.
    - Very Much
    - Somewhat
    - Not Much At All

12. To what degree did you find interaction with the other students rewarding?
    - Very Much
    - Somewhat
    - Not Much At All

13. To what degree do you feel a sense of accomplishment from completing the REU program?
    - Very Much
    - Somewhat
    - Not Much At All

14. How strongly would you recommend the Missouri State University REU program to others?
    - Very Much
    - Somewhat
    - Not Much At All
15. And finally, do you have any suggestions for how the program could be improved?

Thank you very much for your opinions.