

Survey Report  
Associated Colleges of the South  
**Undergraduate Research and Engagement Initiative**  
May 30, 2008

**Introduction**

During the academic years 2005-06 and 2006-07, the Associated Colleges of the South (ACS), a consortium of sixteen distinguished liberal arts colleges and universities located in the South, issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) designed to offer more opportunities for collaborative research/scholarship between/among students and faculty at its member institutions. Most notably, it enabled the five institutions that were awarded grants to engage disciplines outside of the natural sciences in the collaborative research/scholarship process, expand current projects beyond summer programming, and/or design programs that were much larger in scope.

Four campuses were awarded funding with one campus being awarded two grants each. Five grantees participated in the survey questionnaire. The grants ranged from \$22,000 to \$28,000. Their responses are summarized in this document. The survey questionnaire consisted of twenty-two response items, designed to measure the degree of campus impact and the potential need for continued programmatic funding support.

**Survey Responses**

The first seven questions of the survey pertained to informational items relating to the institution and the persons completing the survey form. All five surveys were submitted by persons holding faculty rank and actively engaged in instruction. The disciplines were philosophy/religion, theatre arts, and mathematics/computer science.

The institutions represented are:

\* Birmingham-Southern College, University of Richmond, Rollins College, Rhodes College and Trinity University

**Question 8: Were there opportunities for student/professor collaborative research on your campus prior to this grant?**

While all the grantees institutions already provided some type of opportunities for collaboration, this grant allowed them to go beyond the traditional collaborative design and create new models of scholarly research and learning.

**Questions 9-10: What were the desired outcomes of your grant? Did you achieve them?**

While the scope of these projects varied greatly, all five were successful in meeting their goals. In the case of Birmingham-Southern College's Miss Julie Project, the goals were very finite. The student-teacher team set out to develop a play, perform it both locally and internationally, and conduct discussions and write a publication about the play and their experiences. In contrast, Trinity University chose a project which was much broader in scope.

*Increasing Collaborative Research through Investigations of Interdisciplinary Multi-Agent Simulations* proposed to design a research model that utilized multi-agent simulations. While the development of this model is still on-going, the main goal of the project, to increase the participation of non-science majors in the undergraduate research community at Trinity, was met. Similarly, the University of Richmond also initiated a large scope project entitled *LURE: Long-Term Undergraduate Research Experience*. Even though most of its project goals extended far beyond the timeline of this grant, the University was able to meet its short-term goal which was to use the ACS grant as seed money in order to get long-term funding from the National Science Foundation.

**Question 11: Were there any opportunities/challenges that were brought to light by your project? What were they?**

Efforts to meet program goals were not without challenge. The majority of grantees underestimated the amount of time and/or funding needed to successfully meet their goals. For example, Trinity University found that the actual development of their MAS (Multi-Agent Simulation) Platform took much longer than anticipated. As a result, they recommended that their summer program be held over several summers in the future. On the other hand, Birmingham-Southern College underestimated the costs associated with developing and presenting a theatrical production. In particular, they cited that costs of the venue rental in Edinburg, as well as shipping costs of furniture for their sets. In the latter case, they recommended purchasing furniture overseas rather than shipping what was already purchased.

In addition to budget and time constraints, one institution, Rollins College, had problems with student and faculty attrition. While the main purpose of their project was to offer a student/faculty collaborative research/scholarship opportunity that extended beyond their eight week Summer Scholarship Program, the longer timeframe resulted in the loss of a faculty member who took another job, and several students who either graduated early, left their major, or left the institution altogether. Even though these challenges did not prevent the grantees from meeting their goals, they were major unforeseen setbacks that resulted from their efforts to expand their initial program.

Several grantees also cited unexpected opportunities which were brought to light by their projects. Perhaps most notable, were the changes that occurred on Rollins campus as a result of their *Young Scholars Collective* project. Recognition of similarities in various student-faculty team projects led to on-campus programming, as well as student-sponsored clubs and organizational activities. A variety of service learning projects were also developed as spin offs of the initial research work. While many of these activities and events were initiated by student members of the research teams themselves, some were started by other students who were influenced by their peers in the project. One such service learning activity resulted in *Farm*

*Workers' Awareness*, a new campus organization and a related student-made documentary about pesticides and the working conditions of farm workers that was shown on campus.

Additionally, Trinity College noted unexpected results. In addition to meeting their goals of developing a first-year seminar course and a senior-level research course that allowed students to explore social behaviors in virtual environments, participants discovered that they had "raised the bar" for other departments to offer research opportunities to their students earlier in their college career.

**Question 12: If you could redesign your project, what would you do differently? Why?**

Only two respondents mentioned any program design changes. University of Richmond would build in opportunities for older, experienced students to mentor 1st and 2nd year students. The Miss Julie Project at Birmingham-Southern College would add venue rental as a budget item and purchase furniture overseas rather than ship it from Birmingham.

**Question 13: Was your grant a catalyst for other initiatives or changes on campus?**

Not only was the grant a catalyst in the creation of new student/faculty collaborative scholarship opportunities, it was successful in attracting a variety of initiatives. New research projects, a newly created theatrical performance, both summer programming and those offered during the academic year were seen on campus as a result of awarded grant funding.

**Questions 14-15: How did you share your project on campus, with ACS institutions, and the others?**

Grantees found diverse ways of sharing their project results. Through ACS activities and publications, project websites, articles, and conference presentations on campus and at national and international venues, institutions that received ACS grants were able to communicate their goals and results to others. Birmingham-Southern College was also able to share their project in two unique ways. Participants performed *Miss Julie* at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the largest and most distinctive performing arts festival in the world. They also participated in a panel presentation at the Southeastern Theatre Conference, the largest conference of its kind in the country.

**Question 16: What are your planned follow-up activities?**

As a result of their initial successes, all five ACS-funded projects have decided to seek funding to further their work. One project, *LURE: Long-Term Undergraduate Research Project*, has already succeeded in receiving additional funding to extend their project beyond the original grant period. Through a grant from the National Science Foundation, the University of Richmond will be able to continue its program for four years. Not only will they continue scholarship/research collaborations among faculty and students, but they will also collaborate with faculty and students from four other colleges that received similar grants from NSF.

Rollins College also plans to continue its project. They will put out call for proposals in the Fall of 2008 and begin with the next cohort group in the Spring of 2009. The Young Scholars Collective is scheduled to last through the Spring of 2009. Additionally, the current project received funding from the Dean of Faculty Office that will enable students to travel to professional conferences to present the original research with their collaborating faculty members.

**Question 17: Are the students who were involved in the project continuing to do research with project faculty? Other faculty? Independently? If so, what are they doing?**

Faculty and students continue to work on related projects both collaboratively and individually. In fact, with the exception of students who have graduated, most of the faculty and students involved in the grant projects continue to do some type of research in their fields.

**Question 18: How has the grant project influenced the students and faculty involved?**

The students and faculty involved in the Undergraduate Research and Engagement grant were also influenced beyond initial expectations. Students at the University of Richmond reported their Undergraduate Research and Engagement project, *LURE: Long-term Undergraduate Research Experience* as being the highlight of their summer. In particular, they noted benefits such as "understanding the research process," "skill at giving oral presentations," and "gaining self-confidence."

In the case of Rollins College, students who participated in the *Young Scholars Collective* reported their research project experience as being the highlight of their college career. They felt that it was a "synthesis of all of the work they had done during their time in college." They also noted that the project experience had "enabled them to better apply their major in the real world." As a result of their positive experiences, the students, who were graduating seniors, plan to return to the campus in the Fall to help recruit the next cohort group. Faculty involved in the *Young Scholars Collective* credited the project with helping their students to become more effective student leaders. They felt that the experience also augmented faculty mentoring and communications skills. Faculty at both Rollins College and Trinity University reported that lasting bonds had been formed across disciplines among students and faculty.

**SUMMARY**

Overall, the ACS Undergraduate Research and Engagement Grant Program was a great success. It led to the creation of new models of collaborative scholarship/research and offered research opportunities for faculty and students outside of the natural science fields. The program also allowed the students involved to actively engage in collaborative scholarship/research and the culture, methodology, and issues related to it. Similarly, the grant gave faculty opportunities to enhance their teaching and contributions to their discipline. Of equal importance is the fact that the program impacted the culture of the campuses involved, often resulting in related campus programs and activities. While the grant program had its challenges, they were outweighed by the many benefits that resulted from them.