

Closing Thoughts

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Navigating a successful academic career can be challenging for any student, and the barriers for low socioeconomic status (low-SES) students often make this path even more difficult. Many students that are in lower socioeconomic status do not have access to resources or have the connections needed to know how and where to get the support they need. This is especially true for students in STEM disciplines. Efforts, like the Purdue Rising Scholars program, provide opportunities for students to build relationships with professors, university staff, graduate students and their peers to increase their retention and success within our college and beyond.

As evidenced by the articles within this journal, students participating in the Purdue Rising Scholars program gain valuable undergraduate research experiences in a variety of technical fields from exploring perceptions of cybersecurity to developing cooling pads for hogs. While learning basic research skills and writing articles are core outcomes of their work, these students gain much more in terms of building relationships with faculty and graduate student mentors.

Through the support of a National Science Foundation grant, Purdue College of Agriculture faculty, in partnership with colleagues in the College of Engineering, have worked hard to develop models that enhance the success of low-SES students in STEM fields. This program was designed to provide students with significant mentoring – at every level – and although the numbers are still small, we believe these experiences enhance the success of our students.

This journal represents the culmination of research projects conducted by the students in the Rising Scholars program and captures what they learned. Beyond the academic credentials they gained during their time on campus, this study demonstrated that the experiences outside of the traditional classroom can have long-lasting impacts.

Having a strong adult support network – good mentors – can allow students to have a sounding board when it comes to not only their academic career, but also the activities they participate in, internship opportunities they pursue and long term career success. I want to thank Dr. Bob Stwalley for undertaking this special initiative and putting the time and effort into helping a new generation of students, particularly those with low SES move from Rising Scholars to Rising Stars.