INTERVIEW

WITH AMY CHILDRESS

Amy Childress serves as the first director in the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) at Purdue University. To learn more about OUR, visit www.purdue.edu/undergrad-research.

AMY CHILDRESS

What originally brought you to the Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR) at Purdue?

I was excited for the opportunity to help bring to life the vision of a new Office of Undergraduate Research, initially proposed by a subcommittee of faculty and staff. Working

with the OUR is a natural extension of my previous work. I was fortunate to have spent several years administering and conducting research on multiple campus-wide undergraduate research experiences (UREs) at the Discovery Learning Research Center (now known as the Evaluation and Learning Research Center). We examined best practices for program administration and impacts of UREs on students.

What does OUR provide for Purdue students?

The OUR engages with students through a variety of activities in order to maximize our reach and impact. We partner with the colleges on the OUR Scholarship Program to provide 100 annual research scholarships. We are excited about our upcoming online courses for both prospective and currently engaged researchers. The OUR will offer an online course for prospective undergraduate researchers to establish a broad-based, common understanding of research in order to make an immediate impact

in a research environment (available spring 2019). We will also offer a series of three online courses for current undergraduate researchers to expand upon transferable skills, such as communication, reflection, and mentorship, which will prepare these students for professional development and lifelong learning (beginning fall 2018). We provide funding in the form of travel grants and research grants to help support undergraduate repercussions efforts. We conduct a weekly seminar series, in partnership with Purdue Libraries faculty members, which addresses a number of research-related topics for both current and prospective undergraduate researchers. OUR now hosts the annual Purdue Undergraduate Research Conference in April and are adding an annual Fall Undergraduate Research Expo. We also advise prospective undergraduate researchers on how to search for and apply to UREs.

How do students get involved with OUR functions?

Students should begin with our website, which contains a great deal of student-focused content. The site offers an online application system for multiple UREs, OURConnect, in addition to information on applying for a URE, funding opportunities, research conferences, research seminars, and a calendar of events. One of the best ways that students can keep up with the happenings of the office is to sign up online for our newsletter. It is a short e-mail set every few weeks that briefly details the top two or three upcoming OUR activities. JJ Sadler, the OUR associate director, does a fantastic job of maintaining our website and creating a regular newsletter.

Office of Undergraduate Research staff (left to right): Associate Director JJ Sadler, Administrative Assistant Angie Eldridge, and Director Amy Childress.

Why should Purdue students pursue research before they graduate?

AAC&U (www.aacu.org/leap/hips) considers undergraduate research to be a high-impact educational practice, with active learning activities generally accepted as beneficial to students. Student researchers better develop critical-thinking and professional skills that are essential for their long-term professional careers and they improve their ability to communicate with diverse audiences. They tend to gain a deeper understanding of their disciplinary knowledge. Participation in UREs can help students to solidify their academic and career aspirations, helping with retention and persistence as well as decreasing time to degree. We hope that undergraduate researchers reflect upon their UREs—both during and after—in order to better connect what they learn in and out of the classroom.

What advice do you have for undergraduate students interested in getting involved with research?

Students gain more from a research experience when they can make a significant time commitment (e.g., at least two semesters part-time or a summer full-time). Think about what topics truly interest you: subjects that sparked your curiosity in one of your classes; subjects that relate to professional or graduate school, or possible career options; and any long-held personal passions. Consider what skills

and knowledge you bring to the research project. Start looking early so you have time to fit it into your plan of study. Visit our website both for tips on how to approach potential research mentors and to search for open opportunities across several URE programs. The OUR staff are here to help you with this process, so please contact us with your questions.

What are OUR's goals for the future of undergraduate research at Purdue?

An important goal is to meet the increasing demand for faculty-student mentorship through undergraduate research experiences. We are pursuing multiple initiatives to increase URE opportunities for Purdue undergrads, which includes working with campus partners to expand research positions for students across disciplines, backgrounds, and class standing. The OUR connects with faculty and staff through an ongoing community of practice to share information and best practices, as well as to brainstorm new and/or better ways to approach UREs and remove barriers for participants. We strive to provide faculty, staff, and graduate students with research-based best practices for URE design and administration, mentorship, and other resources. Furthermore, we continue to pursue additional events for current undergraduate researchers to disseminate their research results in traditional venues (e.g., research conferences) and alternative hands-on formats better suited to other disciplines and projects.

Interviewer

Eliza Van is a sophomore in Purdue's Honors College pursuing a dual degree in English from the College of Liberal Arts and human development and family studies from the College of Health and Human Sciences.

She is also studying two minors: sociology and women's studies. Van served as the coordinator for this volume of the *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research*. She also is involved as a writing tutor in Purdue's Writing Lab and as an ambassador for both the College of Liberal Arts and the Honors College.