

Designing and Implementing Course-Based Research in the Undergraduate Curriculum to Enhance Active Learning

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Abstract

Gaining experience of research in an undergraduate course equips students with analytical skills that are relevant to solving real-life problems. This article introduces the design and implementation of qualitative research activities in an undergraduate general education capstone course titled *Children as Consumers: Marketing to the Youth*. The course was delivered in a blended learning mode. Undergraduate students interviewed an informant about his or her favorite retail shop and compared the results with the assigned reading on the consumption habits of adolescents. Students in groups then participated in an empirical study using qualitative interviews to explore financial literacy among children and teens. Research activities include preparing applications for institutional ethical approval, designing interview questions, conducting qualitative interviews, analyzing qualitative data, and applying the research findings in the design of marketing campaign messages. In addition to the instructor's assessment, students received comments from the marketing professionals from the Investor and Financial Education Council, who reviewed all the presentation videos. Feedback from students was analyzed to examine their perceptions of the research activities and the research project. External reviews of the course design and implementation are presented. These research activities can be scaled up for larger classes or conducted in an online setting. Recommendations for implementing course-based research are provided in the conclusion.

Keywords: innovative pedagogy, blended learning, interdisciplinary course, research ethics, social sciences

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Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of higher education, there is a consensus that traditional teaching methods are no longer sufficient to enhance students' academic capabilities. The passive acquisition of knowledge through lectures is ineffective, with students retaining a mere fraction of the information conveyed. This pedagogical shortcoming has spurred the exploration and implementation of alternative educational approaches, among which "Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experiences" have emerged as an innovative pedagogy (e.g. Wallin et al., 2016). Course-Based undergraduate research experiences, which have gained significant traction in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, are now practiced in non-science disciplines, including marketing and communication (Ballen et al., 2017).

Traditionally, undergraduate students gain empirical research experience in independent study courses offered in the senior years of the curriculum as a required course or an elective option, e.g. a Final Year Project. Supervision of undergraduate research is usually conducted on a one-to-one basis. The number of undergraduate students benefiting from such experiences may be limited. However, course-based

undergraduate research is a means of involving all undergraduate students in both junior and senior years. The objective is to provide undergraduate students with an opportunity to solve a real-life problem in a selected discipline. Students are tasked with applying theoretical knowledge and practical skills to design a solution to a real-world problem. The course is thus designed to equip students with research skills that should benefit their future careers.

In this paper, we review the literature on undergraduate research as an innovative teaching pedagogy and then we illustrate the practice with a case study that provides empirical evidence of students' learning journey. The paper also discusses how to evaluate the outcomes of undergraduates' research experience, assesses the challenges faced by instructors and students on this kind of course, and provides new insights into the implementation of course-based research.

Literature Review

Course-based undergraduate research experiences (CURE) are popular in STEM education, as they offer students the opportunity to engage in authentic research within a classroom setting. In contemporary higher education, course-based undergrad-