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Getting off to a good start? : First-year undergraduate research experiences and student outcomes /

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Abstract

Undergraduate research is widely perceived as a “high-impact practice” that promotes students’ learning, cognition, career planning, and educational attainment. With some exceptions, the existing evidence largely provides support for these beliefs. However, these studies typically examine research experiences that occur later in the undergraduate years, whereas engaging in undergraduate research during the first year is becoming increasingly common. First-year experiences may yield different outcomes than later experiences for a variety of reasons; in addition, previous studies often do not account sufficiently for self-selection into undergraduate research, which may be especially problematic for cross-sectional studies that occur in the junior or senior year. Therefore, this study examines the potential impact of first-year undergraduate research using propensity score analyses within a large, multi-institutional, longitudinal dataset. Research participation is significantly and positively related to first-year university satisfaction and fourth-year undergraduate GPA, but it is

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unrelated to satisfaction and grades in other years as well as graduate degree intentions, retention at the same institution, and 4-year graduation. Conditional analyses indicate that these effects are largely consistent across student demographics, pre-university achievement, and institutional selectivity.

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