

Undergraduate Research and Inquiry: Increasing Equity, Engagement, and Success

Participation in undergraduate research and inquiry (URI) is a high-impact student engagement experience with real-world impact that has been shown to increase student engagement, retention, and success, particularly in HSI and other URM-serving institutions (Barron et al, 2020). With the goal of increasing student engagement and success, particularly among student populations who suffer from lower retention rates, the University of Arizona's office of Students Engagement and Career Development under the Provost's Office has partnered with the office of Societal Impact under the Office of Research, Innovation, and Impact to increase the number, diversity, and accessibility of experiences in undergraduate research and inquiry while minimizing barriers to participating experienced by underrepresented student groups. Approaches to this include serving as a source of knowledge about the multitude of excellent programs that exist across campus (CURES, VIPs, ASEMS, UROC, UBRP, WISE, TIMESTEP, among others); making funding available to faculty to provide paid positions in undergraduate research & inquiry; maintaining an undergraduate research website and active social media presence, and developing an Undergraduate Research Ambassador (URA) program, where trained undergraduates serve as peer mentors to students who seek URI experiences. URAs present in classes and to student clubs, give 1:1 student support in finding and applying for URI opportunities, create social media posts, and help students master the skills to communicate their research goals and results. This session will serve as an introduction to the services currently provided through SECD in collaboration with SI in promotion of URI experiences. It will also open up discussion for brainstorming and collaboration on how best our offices can help promote, support, and further the goals of creating broad and early access to a diversity of experiences in undergraduate research and inquiry.

Dr. Kelley Merriam-Castro

Dr. Kelley Merriam-Castro works as the Program Manager of Undergraduate Research Initiatives, housed in the office of Student Engagement and Career Development. She is passionate about building equitable pathways to success, using her breadth of experience as a researcher and her 18+ years in teaching and student development to help increase the number and diversity of opportunities in undergraduate research & inquiry at UArizona. She uses targeted outreach, education, and peer mentoring to help inform, support, and guide students into these opportunities, particularly among student communities who would most benefit from high-impact student engagement experiences that increase retention and success.

