



Advocacy Talking Points: Undergraduate Research + Career Readiness

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Call to Action

- Federal funding for undergraduate research must be protected and expanded to ensure students gain the skills needed for today's workforce.
- Policymakers must recognize the role of undergraduate research in career readiness and economic development when making funding decisions.
- Institutions need sustainable research funding to provide all students with equitable access to career-enhancing research experiences.
- Investing in undergraduate research is an investment in the future workforce—producing graduates who are better prepared for leadership, innovation, and service.



Critical Role of Undergraduate Research in Career Readiness

1. Undergraduate Research Prepares Students for the Workforce
 - a. Participating in research equips students with essential skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and teamwork—all of which are highly valued by employers. And
 - b. Research experience fosters adaptability, intellectual curiosity, and analytical reasoning, preparing students for careers in rapidly evolving industries.
2. Employers Recognize Research as Workforce Training
 - a. Studies show that employers seek graduates with hands-on, experiential learning experiences, like research, which builds real-world problem-solving abilities.
 - b. Research develops students' ability to manage projects, analyze data, and work independently, key competencies across all sectors.
3. Research Provides Career Pathways Beyond Academia
 - a. Undergraduate research isn't just for future Ph.D. students—it opens doors to careers in business, technology, healthcare, government, and beyond.
 - b. Research experiences help students build professional networks, develop specialized expertise, and explore career options in diverse fields.
4. Strengthening the Talent Pipeline for Innovation and Economic Growth
 - a. A strong research foundation contributes to U.S. competitiveness in STEM, healthcare, social sciences, and humanities by developing a skilled workforce.
 - b. Federal investment in undergraduate research supports the development of highly trained graduates who drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and public service.
5. Research Opportunities Reduce Barriers to Career Advancement
 - a. Undergraduate research particularly benefits first-generation college students, underrepresented minorities, and those from low-income backgrounds, giving them hands-on experience and mentorship that increase retention and career success.
 - b. Providing paid research opportunities ensures that all students—regardless of financial need—can participate and benefit from this high-impact practice.
6. Undergraduate Research Enhances Graduate & Professional School Success
 - a. Research experience is a key differentiator for students applying to graduate, medical, and professional programs.
 - b. Students who engage in undergraduate research are more likely to complete advanced degrees and contribute to the research enterprise long-term.



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7. Addressing Local, State, and National Challenges
 - a. Undergraduate research can provide valuable insights into pressing local and state, and even national issues such as environmental sustainability, healthcare and education.
 - b. Students can contribute to finding solutions to local problems through collaborative research projects with community organizations or local businesses.
 - c. Allows for the gathering of local, community data to better inform local and state-wide policy and national approaches.

8. Undergraduate Research offers tangible demonstration of return on investment in higher education
 - a. By supporting undergraduate research, state legislators can demonstrate a tangible return on their investment in higher education, showcasing the value of public funding for research and innovation.
 - b. Research conducted by undergraduate students can provide valuable data and insights that inform evidence-based policymaking.
 - c. Collaborative community projects foster stronger ties between universities and communities, allowing for universities to be a resource for the surrounding community



Data, Reports, and Resources for Additional Support

Finley, Ashley. AACU. *How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most* (2021) <https://dgm81pnhvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/Research/PDFs/AACUEmployerReport2021.pdf>

The AAC&U report *How College Contributes to Workforce Success: Employer Views on What Matters Most* (2021) provides several key data points that support undergraduate research as a valuable career readiness tool. Here are some key findings that align with the benefits of UR:

- Applied Learning Matters to Employers
 - 96% of employers believe that college experiences requiring students to apply their learning to real-world problems would help prepare graduates for workforce success.
 - More than four in five employers say they would be either “somewhat more likely” or “much more likely” to consider hiring recent college graduates if they had completed an active and applied experiences in college.

UR directly supports this by engaging students in hands-on, inquiry-driven projects that develop problem-solving skills and practical application of knowledge.

- Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving Are Essential
 - 85% of employers say it is very or somewhat important for candidates to demonstrate the ability to think critically to solve complex problems.

UR fosters critical thinking by requiring students to analyze data, evaluate sources, and synthesize new knowledge—key skills employers seek.

- Teamwork and Collaboration Are Highly Valued
 - 83% of employers consider teamwork skills important.
 - UR often involves collaboration between students and faculty, as well as interdisciplinary teamwork, strengthening this key competency.
- Research and Analytical Skills Are in Demand
 - 91% of employers emphasize the importance of employees having the ability to analyze and interpret data.
 - Participation in UR allows students to develop these competencies through systematic inquiry, data collection, and evidence-based reasoning.

Haeger, H., Bueno, E. H., & Sedlacek, Q. (2024). Participation in undergraduate research reduces equity gaps in STEM graduation rates. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.22-03-0061>



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The 2024 study by Haeger, Bueno, and Sedlacek, titled "Participation in Undergraduate Research Reduces Equity Gaps in STEM Graduation Rates," presents compelling evidence on the value of undergraduate research (UR) as a career readiness tool. Key findings include:

- Increased Graduation Rates: Students who engaged in UR were more than twice as likely to graduate in four years and 70% as likely to graduate in six years compared to their non-research peers.
- Reduction in Equity Gaps: Participation in UR halved the four-year graduation equity gaps for students of color, low-income, and first-generation students. At six years, these gaps were completely closed for UR participants.

These findings underscore UR's role in enhancing academic success and promoting educational equity, thereby preparing a more diverse and capable workforce.

Katz, P. and A. Valk. (2025). *Humanities research for the public good*. Council of Independent Colleges. <https://cic.edu/insights/research-reports/humanities-research-for-the-public-good/>

The "Humanities Research for the Public Good" report by the Council of Independent Colleges highlights the positive impact of humanities research conducted by students and shared with local communities. It focuses on collaborative projects between colleges and community organizations, aiming to foster public engagement, enhance students' research skills, and raise awareness of the humanities. The report also emphasizes the role of student-driven projects in preserving history and addressing contemporary issues through exhibitions, podcasts, and other public presentations.

Lopatto D. Survey of Undergraduate Research Experiences (SURE): first findings. *Cell Biol Educ*. 2004 Winter; 3(4):270-7. <https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.04-07-0045>.

- A study found that 79% of students who participated in undergraduate research reported significant improvements in their problem-solving and analytical skills
- A 2023 survey found that STEM employers actively seek candidates with research experience because it develops independent problem-solving and innovative thinking.

Newell, M., & Ulrich, P. (2022). *Competent and employed: STEM alumni perspectives on undergraduate research and NACE career-readiness competencies*. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 13(1). <https://doi.org/10.21153/jtlge2022vol13no1art1534>

- Only 14% of students who engage in research go on to earn a Ph.D., but research experience opens doors to careers in technology, healthcare, business, and public policy. (Newell, M., & Ulrich, P. (2022))

Science & Technology Action Committee. (2025). *Vision for American Science & Technology: Unleashing American Potential*. <https://www.vastfuture.org/>

The Vision for American Science & Technology (VAST) charts the way for the U.S. science & technology (S&T) enterprise to support America's global leadership. Drawing from the collective insights and experiences of an unprecedented array of leaders, VAST seeks to empower U.S. decisionmakers with a roadmap to ensure the American S&T enterprise remains the vanguard on an increasingly competitive world stage.