

Undergraduate Experiential Inquiry and Research at Rice University Quality Enhancement Plan

Executive Summary

As a leading research university with a distinctive commitment to undergraduate education, Rice University aspires to pathbreaking research, unsurpassed teaching, and contributions to the betterment of our world. It seeks to fulfill this mission by cultivating a diverse community of learning and discovery that produces leaders across the spectrum of human endeavor.

Rice University Mission Statement (2005, 2015)

Undergraduate Experiential Inquiry and Research at Rice charts a course to enhance the way Rice delivers education and curriculum by engaging students more deeply and meaningfully throughout their course of study. It strengthens the university's commitment to excellent undergraduate education by providing the resources and vision to build a strong foundation for undergraduate research starting in the freshman year.

Undergraduate students will have the opportunity to participate in experiential inquiry and research courses that include projects that allow students to be active rather than passive learners. *Experiential Inquiry* is defined as a creative and reflective process where students learn a hands-on approach to examining and investigating open-ended, authentic questions. Students are taught to explore content knowledge in unfamiliar areas. They learn the processes, skills and tools necessary to rigorously and objectively inquire about challenges in their topic of interest. *Research* is broadly defined to include research, design, and other forms of creative work and scholarship as appropriate within and across disciplines. It involves students using experience-based skills and knowledge to address questions or challenges. Ultimately, students will actively pursue solutions or answers to these open-ended, authentic challenges and will produce a tangible work product such as a report, journal article, composition, performance, or prototype.

Undergraduate students will learn to combine theory and practice through inquiry and research and be able to effectively communicate their findings to a diverse set of audiences. The QEP will enable students to:

- Develop the skills and competencies necessary to participate in experiential inquiry and research.
- Frame questions and develop research problems.
- Apply theories or construct models to explore, address, and/or solve open-ended, authentic questions or problems.
- Enhance communication skills in order to present their work effectively to diverse audiences.

Graduate students will contribute to and benefit from the QEP. They will have the opportunity to be trained to assist faculty teaching experiential inquiry courses and to work with undergraduate students engaged in research. Graduate students participating in the program will:

- Acquire and apply pedagogical knowledge and skills concerning the teaching of experiential inquiry and research and, where appropriate, assist in teaching experiential inquiry and research classes.

To help Rice deepen its commitment to undergraduate research and excellence in teaching, the QEP seeks to:

- Develop a culture for undergraduates to actively examine and investigate open-ended, authentic questions.
- Improve advising of undergraduates about the pathways to inquiry and research experiences.
- Enhance the capacity of faculty to incorporate experiential inquiry and research opportunities into their courses.
- Enable graduate students to learn and practice pedagogies for experiential teaching.

Each of these learning outcomes will be accomplished by providing faculty and graduate students the resources and support necessary to improve experiential inquiry and research opportunities for undergraduate students at Rice. A QEP director working with a faculty council will coordinate the program. The director will integrate the efforts of several existing centers on campus including the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Program in Writing and Communication, and the Center for Civic Leadership. These Centers will support the QEP. The director and the members of the faculty council will actively work to improve experiential inquiry and research at Rice.

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