

# **OPTIMIZING DATA SYSTEMS FOR TRACKING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ENGAGEMENT AT USC**

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March 26, 2026



# PURPOSE

- Undergraduate research is a high impact practice, yet the number of students engaged in it at USC remains unknown
- Optimizing existing data systems to track undergraduate research engagement will streamline data collection and provide essential data for strategic planning
- Project scope includes USC Columbia students engaged in undergraduate research through paid positions, academic credit for independent studies/senior thesis, and volunteers.



# GOALS

- Improve reporting consistency for undergraduate research engagement
- Quantify how many students are engaging in undergraduate research in three different ways: paid, course credit, volunteer
- Integrate existing distinct data sources to accurately reflect the number of students engaged in undergraduate research at USC Columbia each semester



# RESEARCH REGISTRY DATA - COLUMBIA

Research Registry is the current system for tracking undergraduate research engagement.

	Fall 2025	Spring 2026
<b>Paid</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Academic Credit</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Volunteer</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>148</b>

For 2025-2026, 344 students submitted a research experience to the Research Registry.



# PEOPLE INVOLVED

- **Project Sponsor:** Dr. Lumi Bakos, Associate VP for Research Operations
- **Team Members:** Tricia Kramer, Ajay Patel
- **Subject Matter Experts:** Dr. Sarah Williams, Dr. Amber Fallucca, Dr. Aaron Marterer, Dr. Wayne Outten, Dr. Michael Dickson, Lauren Epps, Gina Spence, Dr. Trena Houpp, Davon Wright
- **End Users:** Office of Undergraduate Research, Office of Vice President for Research, Academic Units, Departments, Center for Integrative and Experiential Learning



# PROJECT PATH

- **Discovery**  
Met with subject matter experts, Associate/Assistant Dean's Council, student focus group
- **Possibility**  
Based on feedback from discovery phase, explored HR reporting, capabilities of EAB Navigate, included academic advisors in targeted outreach
- **Planning**  
Compile and clean data, create implementation plan



# KEY IMPROVEMENTS

## Streamlined data collection

- **Paid positions** - obtain HR report each semester on students classified as “undergraduate research assistants”
- **Independent Study/Senior Thesis** – for independent courses designated as “GLD Research” courses, use EAB Navigate to download course rosters each semester
- **Research Volunteers** – increase outreach to students, faculty and academic advisors to encourage students to submit experience to Research Registry



# RESULTS

	Fall 2025	Spring 2026
<b>Paid (HR report)</b>	<b>627</b>	<b>705</b>
<b>Academic Credit (IS/Thesis)</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>635</b>
<b>Volunteer (Registry)</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1263</b>	<b>1364</b>

**2,627 undergraduate research engagements for academic year 2025-26.**

**Volunteer count is an under-estimate.**

# RESULTS

	2025-2026
<b>Before (Research Registry)</b>	<b>344</b>
<b>After (Combined Sources)</b>	<b>2627</b>

The new method of data collection captures almost 8x more undergraduate research engagements than the Research Registry alone.



# NEXT STEPS

## **Increase efforts to count research volunteers**

-Targeted outreach to students, faculty and academic advisors on importance of adding **research volunteers** to the registry

## **Additional data on students engaging in undergraduate research**

-Work with OIRAA to obtain aggregate data on students engaged in undergraduate research (graduation and retention rates, GPA, demographics) for strategic planning purposes



# REFLECTIONS

- Discovery phase lays the foundation for a successful project
- Progress not perfection
- Improvement comes in phases



# THANK YOU!

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