

## QEP EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette's 2020 Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), *Advance: Student Research Experience*, aims to create an environment in which undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative activity can flourish. *Advance* supports UL Lafayette's *Strategic Plan* to increase student productivity and success through engagement in mentored research, innovative projects, and creative endeavors.

*Advance* resulted from a thorough idea generation, selection and development process that began in 2017 and included input from students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni. The University's 2015-2020 *Strategic Plan* served as a guiding document in the development of *Advance*, which shares with the *Strategic Plan* the goal of providing "research opportunities for all undergraduate students, regardless of major."

*Advance* establishes a university-wide undergraduate research (UR) program designed to provide each undergraduate with the opportunity to complete a Student Research Experience (SRE), a sustained effort to apply subject knowledge, skills, and abilities to a project valued by the discipline. To achieve this goal, *Advance* activities support the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):

**SLO 1:** Students will acquire and demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities to complete an SRE.

**SLO 2:** Students will recognize the value of research, scholarship, and creativity in developing and improving knowledge, and in facilitating learning.

**SLO 3:** Students will demonstrate the skills necessary to articulate the results of an SRE in appropriate formats, venues, and delivery modes.

To ensure that a broad student base is reached, each undergraduate program identified *Advance* pathways, a series of courses that provide students with the knowledge, skills, abilities, and guidance to complete an SRE. SLOs are assessed by direct and indirect measures, including specialized student evaluations of instruction, rubrics and tests, and the National Survey of Student Engagement.

UL Lafayette has dedicated significant personnel and financial resources to support student research activities. Resources are used for

- Student Travel Grants
- Faculty Grants for student research
- Presentation Skills Workshops
- Curriculum Development Workshops
- An in-house UR Journal
- Student Center for Research
- An annual UR Conference
- Institutional Repository
- Library Enhancements
- Writing Center Enhancements

## FIFTH YEAR INTERIM REPORT: PART V

### University of Louisiana at Lafayette QEP Impact Report: Advance Student Research Experience

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), established in 2020, called for the development and implementation of the *Advance Student Research Program* (Advance). Because the University was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, little progress was made during the first year. However, in 2021, the Student Center for Research, Creativity, and Scholarship (SCRCS) opened, and a director was hired to implement the program. During the 2022-2023 academic year (two years behind schedule), the first five Advance Student Research Experience (ASRE) Pathways were designed and piloted (Table 1). ASRE Pathways include curricular and co-curricular experiences chosen by the academic community in a discipline to develop, support, and engage students in research and scholarly innovation. All five of the original *Action Items* stated in the QEP have been addressed; however, the implementation and final products have been modified to build sustainable practices.

### INITIAL GOALS AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

Three initial goals with matching student learning outcomes and five action items served as the focus of the QEP that was written in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Goal 1: Provide more students with the opportunity to complete student research experiences (SRE).** *SLO:* Students acquire and demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities to complete an SRE. *Action Item:* Create Advance Pathways in each undergraduate program.

Advance aimed to develop curricula that allow students to acquire and demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities to complete student research experiences (SRE). Advance asked programs to create curriculum maps with pathways for students to complete SREs.

Advance curricular maps were envisioned to include four types of courses:

- a. Introduction or exposure courses that teach students to recognize the types of SREs available in a discipline, and identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to complete them.
- b. Skills or Methods courses that allow students to acquire and demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities to complete an SRE.
- c. SRE courses that give students the opportunity to apply knowledge, skills, and abilities to research, design, scholarship, or creative projects.
- d. Dissemination courses that prepare students to articulate the results of an SRE in appropriate formats, venues, and delivery modes.

**Goal 2: Develop a campus culture that supports and rewards participation in high-impact research, scholarship, and creative activities.** *SLO:* Students recognize the value of research, scholarship or creativity in developing and improving knowledge, and facilitating learning. *Action items:* Establish (1.) Advance SRE of distinction, and (2.) Student Center for Research. (3.) Increase opportunities for students to present, perform and publish their work.

**Goal 3: Prepare students to present or publish.** *SLO:* Students demonstrate the skills necessary to articulate the results of an SRE in appropriate formats, venues and delivery modes. *Action Item:* Develop programs to support the dissemination of SREs.

Advance planned to increase opportunities for students to present, perform, and publish their work. The plan included the following:

1. UL Lafayette Undergraduate Research Conference will develop into a showcase for Advance.
2. Advance Student Travel Grant Program will provide students with funds to present at regional and national conferences.
3. Advance Student Research Week will be a week-long celebration of SREs.
4. Advance Journal for Student Research will publish the products of SREs.
5. UL Lafayette Institutional Repository will dedicate space to showcase the products of SREs.
6. The Writing Lab will develop workshops and guides for writing in the disciplines.
7. The Student Center for Research will establish a presentation-skills workshop series.

## CHANGES TO THE QEP AND REASONS FOR THOSE CHANGES

The goals and student learning outcomes of the QEP remained unchanged during implementation. However, financial constraints required the adoption of more frugal and optimized strategies. The Advance Program launched in 2020 but experienced reduced visibility, momentum, and funding due to the COVID pandemic. Two action items were not implemented: Student Travel Grants and Student Research Journal (italicized above). Other planned action items were delayed for multiple semesters, requiring a reimaged implementation approach and resulting in postponed quantitative outcomes (Table 1).

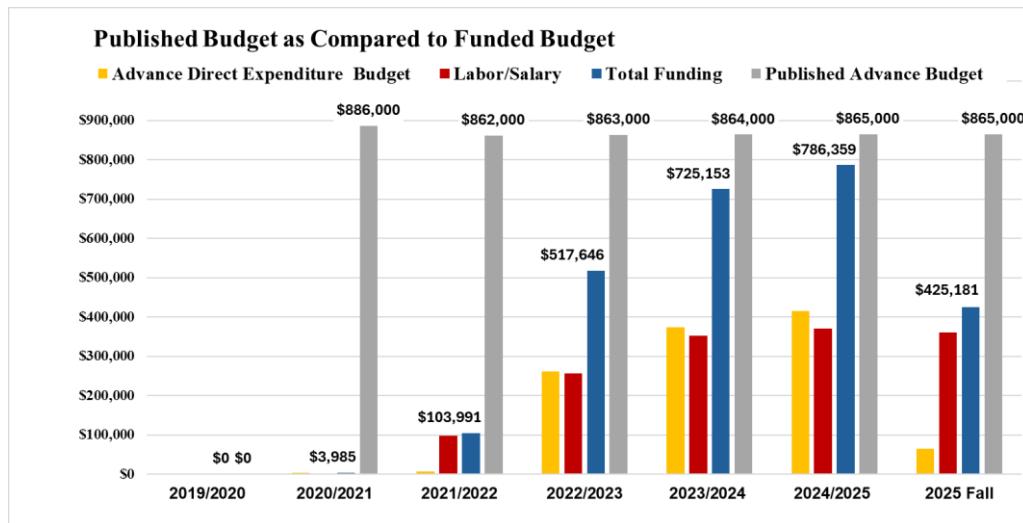
As of Fall 2025, Advance Student Research Experience (ASRE) Pathways that include curricular and co-curricular activities have been designed and implemented in 90% of the degree-granting programs at UL Lafayette.

**Table 1: Implementation Timeline for Advance Student Research Program**

2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	Spring 2025
“ALL STOP”	Restart	Strategic Planning	ASRE Pathways Begin	Growing Fast	Advance Pathways and Program Built	Student Participation Increases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- QEP is approved</li> <li>- 2020 is the official start date of the QEP</li> <li>- Covid stops QEP’s initial start</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advance Program Director hired 2021</li> <li>-Student Research Center (SCRCS) opens March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New implementation plan developed</li> <li>- Advance Program added to new UL Lafayette Strategic Plan</li> <li>- Five Academic Departments recruited for ASRE Pathway Pilot Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ASRE Pathway Pilot Program designed and in academic catalog</li> <li>- Leaf Awards start (2023)</li> <li>- Advance Grants to support faculty mentoring students begin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 22 degree-granting programs adopt ASRE Pathways</li> <li>- First ASRE graduates earn transcript designation</li> <li>- Funded as published in QEP description</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All five action items in the QEP have been addressed</li> <li>- ASRE Pathways are established</li> <li>- Advance programming and best practices are established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ASRE Pathways are established in 95% of the degree granting programs and students participation increased significantly</li> </ul>
No ASRE Pathway	No ASRE Pathway	No ASRE Pathway	ASRE Path Participants: 0	ASRE Pathway Participants: 130	ASRE Pathway Participants: 251	ASRE Participants 545

Advance's original plan focused primarily on increasing student participation in mentored undergraduate research experiences (MUREs) through greater exposure to course-based undergraduate research experiences (CUREs), and the production of new SRE courses (italicized in goal one above). Co-curricular activities were initially designed as supplemental or celebratory. The revised approach established clearly defined curricular and co-curricular events into single pathways that introduce research, build research skills, and promote dissemination of results. The changes elevated co-curricular activities to a necessary part of the students' experience. Even as pandemic effects subsided, the initial vision—creating new, Student Research Experience (SRE) courses, as a single path to student research distinction in all disciplines—proved unsustainable.

**Figure 1: Published Budget Compared to Funded Budget**



Funding to hire new faculty, compensate current faculty for CURE instruction, and support undergraduate research grants was limited (Figure 1). The Student Center for Research, Creativity, and Scholarship (SCRCS) opened (action item completed) but did not offer ASRE courses; instead, each academic department now hosts its own Program Undergraduate Research Experience (PURE), referred to as an ASRE Pathway.

Library funding was redirected from purchasing laptop computers and space renovation toward Advance Equipment located in academic departments and Faculty/Staff Grants that directly support undergraduate research.

The Advance Student Research Week was not established, but colleges and departments created new symposia and conferences. Advance also developed a Hybrid Research Showcase held each spring in the library, complementing the Advance Undergraduate Research Conference in the fall. Summer Undergraduate Research Experiences (SUREs) remain underdeveloped, but faculty continue to write external grants that include a limited number of these fully funded opportunities.

Faculty commitment to mentored research remains strong, though “buy-in” to the original QEP vision declined during the pandemic due to heavier teaching loads and limited faculty replacements. Implementation adjustments shifted emphasis from creating new courses to redesigning existing courses. Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) now support faculty integrating CUREs into current curricula. The latest model maps existing CURE, skills-based, and capstone courses into cohesive success. The ASRE Pathways now function as a low-risk, no-cost, high-reward framework that guides, supports, and tracks undergraduate research participation and achievement.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE QEP'S IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING AND SUCCESS

Prior to the Advance Program Pathways, MURE opportunities were limited to students in specific programs or with connections to specific faculty. However, UL Lafayette wanted to reach more students than these programs held or would hold. Also, not all degree-granting disciplines utilize the scholarship work positions, and/or there were no robust departmental support systems for large numbers of those students. Furthermore, faculty and staff who engage in these high-impact experiences (URAP, McNair, Trio, LAMP, Biology Placement) are not formally recognized, and the effectiveness of their efforts is not assessed outside the individual units. Without Advance, students who did not enter the University through a silo of excellence were unlikely to know about all the research opportunities that existed. Also pertinent, students who gain undergraduate research experience through one of UL Lafayette's silos of excellence also need clear guidance to understand the robust and complete requirements of becoming a scholar. Clear guidelines assist student researchers in the task of finding, completing and sharing the impact of their endeavors, allowing the University to record the success and provide well-earned recognition.

The ASRE Pathways mapped 95% of the University's curriculum through the lens of research skills development and student participation in research. The ASRE Pathways are a powerful tool, approved by faculty from academic disciplines. They can be used by advisors, academic success offices, and the administration when assisting students interested in research opportunities. Advance focused on and increased opportunities that adhere to the Characteristics of Excellence in Undergraduate Research, published by the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). The ASRE Pathways each outline the portion of the curriculum that embeds research. Advance Program Pathways scaffold learning, requiring introduction, skills and dissemination activities. The Program also recruits and engages students starting in their freshman year, providing workshops to help them prepare for mentored research experiences (MUREs). All the activities are focused on supporting the undergraduate student population before, during, and after participation in MUREs. However, CUREs, internships, fellowships, co-ops and competitions are evaluated as experiences that qualify as distinct or excellent research experiences. Advance chose pedagogy that presents, describes, and supports professional behavior. We ask students to practice self-efficacy by recording and submitting their research-related activity in the same way faculty track their research efforts. This method tightly links curricular and academically relevant co-curricular activities.

Supporting the Pathways are ASRE-approved workshops that are designed to teach desirable skills that faculty are looking for in MURE participants. Advance produced or promoted 25 different workshops focused on topics building competencies important to research. Because resources were limited and Advance wanted to produce a sustainable program, workshops from any relevant University unit can be included in the program. Also, mentors from all reliable resources were included/eligible as "available" for students to work with, including faculty, staff, and community partners. With this flexibility in place, the Pathway guidelines and approval processes were heavily scrutinized to maintain quality and appropriate rigor. The Advance program challenged faculty to imagine new solutions to the problem of a limited capacity when conducting MUREs in ASRE Pathways. Advance worked with the Office of Institutional Effectiveness to develop a standard assessment component included in the annual request materials distributed to degree-granting departments. UL Lafayette now has a robust program that is implemented.

The pilot program for the development of ASRE Pathways included five departments (Biology, Psychology, History, Chemical Engineering, and Architecture and Design). Each department started by building an ASRE scaffold (Table 2).

**Table 2: Advance Learning Strategy Categories vs Accomplishment Levels**

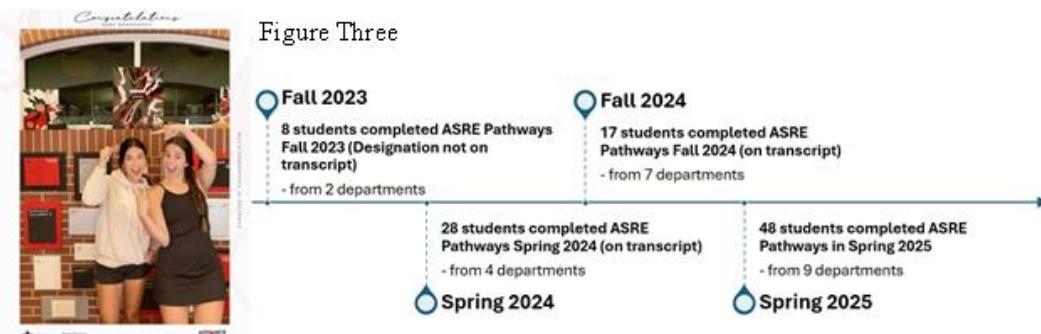
Accomplishment Levels	Advance Learning Strategy Categories		
	Basic	Distinction	Excellence
Introduction	All students in a department with a Pathway are exposed to an introduction to research.		Distinction and Excellence Pathways are chosen for completion by students, tracked by students, and supported by all faculty and staff in that discipline as well as Advance staff and University services.
Discipline-specific skills			
Dissemination			

The scaffold charted the Advance Program's learning-pedagogies (introduction, skills, and dissemination) against levels of accomplishment (basic, distinction, and excellence). The first courses were chosen to complete the scaffolding. Then, co-curricular activities from a co-curricular menu that was developed as part of the Advance Program were added. Each semester, new departments were asked to build, review, and approve ASRE Scaffolding that became ASRE Pathways, resulting in 29 active departments in fall of 2024 and 17 additional active departments in Fall 2025. Three more departments developed pathways during the fall of 2025, therefore, Advance plans for 49 active departments in the Fall 2026. All 49 pathways are outlined for students and the public on the Advance website.

The *Advance Student Research Experience (ASRE) Pathways of distinction or excellence* produce *transcript designations*. Grade point average or ACT scores are not a primary requirement for participation; however, students seeking pathways must be in good academic standing with the University and meet all discipline requirements. Faculty advisors in each department direct students to sign up for the ASRE Pathways in person. Students who choose a major that has produced an ASRE Pathway are included in that discipline's *program undergraduate research experience* (ASRE Pathway).

The Basic ASRE Pathway only includes coursework required for a degree. Therefore, 100% of the students *graduating* in that major have been introduced to research (creative and scholarly activities), taught some research skills within the discipline and taught how to disseminate the results or products of the research. The *distinction* and *excellence* of co-curricular activities must be tracked by the student with help from their academic advisor using an application called "Campus Groups" (by Ready Education). Students completing all the requirements in an ASRE Pathway of distinction or excellence not only earn a designation on their transcript but also receive a challenge coin and the right to sign their name on the wall of honor located in SCRCS (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Timeline of Students Completing ASRE Pathways**



Students can find the requirements for the *Distinction* and *Excellence* Pathways online. At each link students will find: a concept map for each ASRE Pathway, a list of required courses and co-curricular events, and a superscript page containing further explanation about each requirement. Participation in

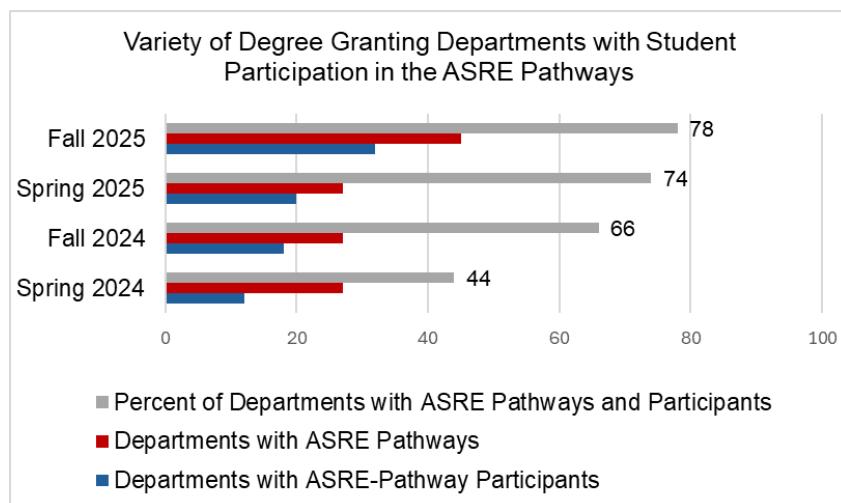
the *Distinction* and *Excellence* pathways requires students to register in person at SCRCS and attend an ASRE Pathway training workshop focused on using “Campus Groups”. Attributes are added to their “Degree Works” account, letting advisors know they are seeking completion of a Pathway. By the end of the Fall semester 2025 (25-26 academic year), there were 545 students enrolled in the program, and 122 students who had earned designations for pathway completion on their transcripts.

The ASRE Pathways represent the most significant accomplishment of the Advance Program, serving as a model for integrating research, creativity, and scholarship across disciplines. However, the Pathway’s success is part of a broader institutional transformation driven by the Advance Program’s second goal that originally included establishing Advance Student Research Experience (SREs) of Distinction, creating the Student Center for Research, and expending student opportunities to present, perform, and publish their work.

### PROGRAM IMPACT BEYOND ASRE PATHWAYS

Upon its launch (March, 2021), the Student Center for Research expanded its name to the Student Center for Research, Creativity, and Scholarship (SCRCS) to ensure the inclusion of non-STEM disciplines. The center employs an Executive Director, Academic Content Coordinator, Coordination Specialist, and ASRE Pathway Manager.

**Figure 3: Variety of Degree Granting Departments with Student Participation in the ASRE Pathways**



All ASRE Pathways begin with the First-Year Seminar (UNIV 100), a problem-based or project-based course that builds critical thinking, information literacy, and communication skills. Advance partnered with the UNIV 100 program to train instructors and provide digital resources through the Welcome UNIV 100 Faculty portal. This collaboration introduces undergraduate research early in students’ academic journeys and promotes awareness of Advance’s programs and opportunities. Informing students early about Advance’s inclusive approach encourages both STEM and non-STEM students to view themselves as researchers and scholars. Participation data reflects rapid growth and broadening engagement (Fig. 3)

- Spring 2024: 27 departments established ASRE Pathways; 12 had participating students.
- Fall 2024: 18 of 27 departments had active student participation.
- Spring 2025: 20 of 27 departments had active student participants.
- Fall 2025: Participation expanded to 32 of 46 departments.

These outcomes demonstrate substantial progress toward embedding research and creative inquiry as foundational elements of the university's undergraduate experience in all degree-granting departments. Students have a broader view of what research means and a more meaningful, field-specific definition.

**ASRE Pathways and Student Recognition.** The ASRE Pathways include a SREs of distinction in each discipline that fulfills the program's original goal of providing exceptional undergraduate research engagement. To celebrate student achievements, the Advance Program established the Leaf Awards, honoring students nominated by faculty for excellence in performing, completing, or disseminating Student Research. An SRE represents a sustained student effort to apply disciplinary knowledge and skills to a meaningful project. Beginning in 2023, nominations were reviewed across 16 disciplinary and impact categories, including Humanities, Life Sciences, Business, Engineering & Technology, Creative Works, and others. Four exceptional students each year receive the Provost Award for interdisciplinary or cross-category excellence.

**Student Dissemination and Research Events.** The Undergraduate Research Conference—formerly associated primarily with the Honors Program—was restructured under Advance to be inclusive of all students. Attendance has grown significantly, from 55 student presentations and conference participants in 2021 to 183 student presentations and 284 conference participants in Fall 2025. Presentation formats now include Lightning Talks, Oral and Poster Sessions, and Creative Activities.

To ensure continuous opportunities for dissemination, Advance also hosts a Spring Undergraduate Research Showcase in Dupré Library. This hybrid event features student displays with interactive QR codes and plans are underway to develop a more robust YouTube channel showcasing presentations. In addition, the visibility of the Advance Program has encouraged multiple colleges and departments to organize their own annual research symposia and performances, often supported by Advance through prizes, participation, and judging. Advance/SCRCS participation in multiple dissemination events has helped broader engagement across campus. This has provided Advance the opportunity to foster inclusivity and showcase the incredible research projects our students produce.

**Advance Grants and Program Funding.** Between Spring 2022 and Spring 2025, the Student Center for Research, Creativity, and Scholarship (SCRCS) administered 150 Advance Grants supporting undergraduate research across 25 departments. Funding categories included Equipment, Faculty, Course Development, and Student Support. Impact reports indicate that 4,935 students benefited through participation in MUREs, CUREs, conference travel, stipends, or research supplies. Additionally, 42 graduate students were trained as mentors under "train-the-trainer" models, building future research mentorship capacity. Although initial funding for Student Travel Grants (\$60,000) was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program has maintained strong momentum through internal reallocation and continued faculty engagement.

**Dupré Library Partnership and DxP Series.** Advance strengthened its partnership with Dupré Library through the DupréPathways (DxP) event series launched in Fall 2023. DxP fosters connections between students, librarians, and faculty to build confidence and improve information literacy.

- 2023–2024: 6 events served 154 students
- 2024–2025: 11 events served 252 students

The collaboration has expanded into the ASRE Librarian subprogram, embedding librarians in approved ASRE courses. Librarians also used an Advance Equipment Grant to establish the Library of Things, which provides technology, scientific models, and learning tools to support diverse academic needs.

**Writing Lab Enhancement.** In 2022, Advance funded the relocation and renovation of the Writing Lab to a central location in Dupré Library. Directed by an English faculty member, the Writing Lab now supports approximately 800 students per semester through 60-minute individual writing consultations and

workshops. This improvement aligns with Advance's goal of strengthening student dissemination and communication skills.

**Specific Discipline's External Accreditation or Reviews.** At a minimum, Biology, Computer Science, Informatics, Chemical Engineering and Accounting have added the Advance Program to their external accreditation process. The departments have reported the Advance Program's focus on undergraduate research which has increased the number of intellectual contributions they produce. In one case, external-reviewers asked, "Is there an appropriate level of learner-faculty interaction?" The department cited new CUREs that have been designed as well as dedicated office hours, faculty engagement with student organizations, and students participating in award celebrations and field trips. Quoting the same department, "Accounting has formally integrated the ADVANCE Program – a university-wide initiative to increase undergraduate student research into its curriculum. Student research projects with a faculty mentor are now required for the Capstone accounting course. This initiative will increase faculty and student interaction and allow ample opportunity for faculty to mentor students."

## UNANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

**Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs).** Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) have significantly increased faculty engagement in the Advance Program while enhancing leadership, management, and mentorship skills.

- 2023–2024: Executive Director of Advance, facilitated an FLC with faculty teaching first-year introduction-to-college courses (UNIV 100) to expand topic-based Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs).
- 2024–2025: An external facilitator worked with 16 faculty from 10 departments to develop CUREs across courses at all academic levels.
- 2025–2026: Advance partnered with the Office of Distance Learning to launch an initiative focused on AI literacy and credentialing. This program integrates generative AI into pedagogy to enhance teaching, expand research access, and strengthen student career readiness.

Each year concludes with a university-wide showcase co-hosted by Advance and the Office of Distance Learning. The positive impact of the FLCs, though not part of the original program design, has proven essential to the ongoing success of Advance initiatives.

**Co-Curricular Tracking and Data Management.** Co-Curricular Tracking and Data Management is critical to the success of the Advance Program. The development of the ASRE Pathways highlighted UL Lafayette's need for a reliable system to track, authenticate, and assess co-curricular activities that require consistent documentation to reflect student engagement beyond the classroom. Although the University had previously attempted to address this need, the Advance Program brought renewed urgency to finding a sustainable, campus-wide solution. It is important that students are responsible for submitting their progress through the ASRE Pathways. This vital component encourages students to select learning-enhancing tasks that foster competencies they are interested in and helps build self-efficacy. The Advance team, in collaboration with faculty, built a co-curricular menu and asked all degree-granting departments to integrate it extensively. Each department identified one to three ASRE Pathway Approvers responsible for reviewing and approving student submissions that could not be automated. Automated events—those that occur regularly and have been pre-approved by Advance staff—were also incorporated into the system.

Additionally, a final approval process was established before ASRE designations are allowed to be added to students' transcripts. Initially, tracking was managed through spreadsheets and manual processes, but the need for efficiency and accessibility prompted the digitization of the system. Recognizing that students conduct much of their academic engagement through mobile devices, Advance identified an application that could be used universally by faculty and students across campus. However, implementing digital tools presented two major lessons: (a) the first application selected did not perform as promised, creating substantial work for the IT department to transition to a new platform; and (b) digital applications are costly. To address these challenges, Advance subscribed to Campus Groups, a platform that provides faculty, staff, and students with tools for co-curricular tracking and authentication. Advance contributes \$10,000 annually toward user support services, while the Office of Student Engagement covers the remaining subscription cost. For this effort to be sustainable, Advance recommends that the Campus Groups subscription be incorporated into the University's general operating budget and adopted as the standard platform across all units.

**Unexpected Statewide Impact.** Unexpected Statewide Impact occurred as a result of lessons learned by SCRCS staff during the implementation of the Advance Program. The impact of the Undergraduate Research Conference and the Executive Director's (ED) involvement in external grant writing has been measurable. Advance's ED served as co-PI on three National Science Foundation (NSF) grants, (*Mentoring, and Career Development for Scholars in Energy Technologies*. NSF DUE 2030574 \$649,825. Granted 2021 to 2026; *Building Capacity at the University of Louisiana for Engineering Education Research: Preliminary Proposal to Bridge Senior S-STEM Scholars to the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP)*. Funded by: Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University. \$15,000. 2023 to 2025; 2023; *Beginnings: Addressing the Talent and Diversity Gap in Biotechnology Workforce*. NSF ExLENT 2322705. \$999,291) and wrote an NSF Scholarship in STEM grant (*Advance Southern Louisiana S-STEM (SOLS) Program*). Advance employees presented at University of Louisiana System's and Council on Undergraduate Research conferences. They also played a large role in the production of The Louisiana Undergraduate Research Association (LaURA), a nonprofit organization that promotes and supports undergraduate research participation in faculty-mentored research and creative projects. The membership comprises Louisiana public and private college and university faculty, administrators, and staff who support the high-impact practice of undergraduate research participation at their respective universities. This impact has been very motivational for faculty and students alike. Twelve UL Lafayette students, joined by 47 of their peers from across the state, presented student research in the Rotunda of the State Capitol on June 9th, 2025. This would not have happened without the Advance Program.

## REFLECTION ON THE INSTITUTION'S EXPERIENCE (LESSONS LEARNED)

Five major lessons emerged during the implementation of the Advance Program.

**1. Faculty Support Must Include Faculty Development.** Faculty support for undergraduate research must go beyond financial assistance and include professional development. Many faculty perceived undergraduate research as an added workload and held preconceived notions about who should participate or what activities qualify as research. These assumptions created barriers to engagement. Encouraging faculty to view undergraduate research as scalable, flexible, and adaptable to their teaching load proved essential. Training sessions focused on managing workload and understanding the functional purpose of the ASRE Pathways were critical for building sustained participation.

**2. Strong Relationships with Administration and Non-Academic Units Are Essential.** Successful implementation depended on the University's administrative infrastructure. Many undergraduate research programs struggle with faculty and student buy-in, but Advance learned that administrative

staff face parallel challenges. Issues such as workload distribution, ownership of applications, branding standards, course and student attribute designations, assessment data management, and purchasing regulations required extensive coordination.

The revised QEP implementation plan was financially leaner, as it did not involve hiring new faculty, but it increased demands on existing staff who were already managing reduced capacity. The burden of bureaucracy affected morale across all employee groups.

The “Advance Faculty Summit” was renamed the “Advance Faculty and Staff Summit” in Fall 2025 to emphasize inclusion and shared responsibility. The event now includes mobile sessions where Advance staff visit groups of five or more employees to provide tailored information and gather feedback.

**3. Inclusive, Frequent, and Transparent Communication Is Critical.** UL Lafayette has long valued undergraduate research, but communication—both internal and external—remains a major challenge. Although numerous undergraduate research activities occur campus-wide, many remain undocumented. With the ASRE Pathways now fully developed, there is finally a clear and centralized structure for faculty, staff, and students to engage with undergraduate research. The next challenge is ensuring consistent awareness and participation. The Office of Planning and Academic Initiatives now includes ASRE Pathways reporting on annual departmental assessment requests, improving data collection and accountability. Students are also working to improve communication. They have formed the Advance Ambassadors organization that launched as a registered “student club” in Fall 2025, The organization will strengthen peer-to-peer communication and student engagement.

**4. Funding Without Functional Processes and Support Can Impede Progress.** Funding challenges were a significant barrier. In several cases, awarded funds remained inaccessible to students due to administrative bottlenecks—particularly for student travel. These difficulties discouraged faculty participation, resulting in approximately 5% of faculty grant funds going unspent and forfeited each fiscal year. The primary reason cited was cumbersome administrative processes.

**5. Flexibility Is Expected, Respected, and Essential.** Building and sustaining undergraduate research programs require adaptability. Implementing shared language, accommodating diverse perspectives, and integrating meaningful actions depend on continuous listening, collaboration, and a willingness to adjust. Flexibility has been key to maintaining momentum and inclusivity in all stages of the Advance Program’s development.