

The Ohio LSAMP Alliance

Evaluation Report: Year 8-3 (2020-2021) – Spring 2021 Faculty/Staff Survey Results

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June 17, 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Funded by the National Science Foundation's Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP) program, The Ohio LSAMP Alliance is comprised of 10 partner institutions of higher learning. The 2020-2021 project-year marks the midway point of the initiative's five-year continuation grant that started in September 2018 (initial grant funding began in September 2013). This report presents the results from the LSAMP Faculty/Staff Survey administered from the end of January through mid-March 2021. The purpose of this biennial evaluation activity is to obtain input about project implementation from a broader group of faculty and staff than is feasible through the annual partner interviews. A total of 99 faculty and staff at LSAMP partner institutions responded to the survey of the 187 invited to do so. The overall response rate (53%) is lower than prior years, but it is noteworthy that the total invited to participate is substantially higher, which suggests that more institutional personnel are involved in LSAMP programming.

The results of the Faculty/Staff Survey show ample evidence that the 10 partner institutions of The Ohio LSAMP Alliance are making consistent progress on the grant's six objectives. Overall, average ratings on every grant objective were "high" (4.40 to 4.96 on a six-point scale). Survey participants gave the highest ratings to how the initiative has facilitated URM STEM students' access to faculty-mentored research (Objective 4: 4.96, 70% high impact) and to innovative, evidence-based, high-impact recruitment and retention practices (4.94, 62% high). Significantly more coordinators and steering committee members gave high ratings to Objective 5 (prepare URM students for and facilitate seamless transition into STEM graduate programs) and Objective 6 (develop and implement an alliance-wide communications plan); respective "high" ratings on Objective 5 were 96 percent for the most active group and 66 percent for the less LSAMP-involved respondents (average was also significantly different, 4.91 versus 4.14) and 90 percent to 67 percent on Objective 6. Respondents also attributed strong LSAMP impacts beneficial to URM STEM students at their institutions in undergraduate research (62%), faculty mentoring (57%), and partnerships between LSAMP Alliance community college and four-year partner institutions (50%).

The greatest reported gains in URM student participation this year occurred in activities designed to aid their transition from community colleges to four-year institutions (43% increase), summer bridge or early arrival program (41%), courses/workshops designed to prepare students for STEM research (40%), and social activities for STEM students (40%). Faculty and staff also reported growth in the involvement of URM students in undergraduate research (38% increase for 1st and 2nd year students and a 37% increase for 3rd and 4th year students). All respondents (100%) reported LSAMP made a difference in the presence of URM students in training programs for peer mentors, STEM professional conferences, and activities designed to aid the transition of students from two-year to four-year institutions.

Most striking in 2021 is the increased attribution of LSAMP as a factor. Compared to 2019, a higher proportion of respondents credited LSAMP with an impact on nine of the 16 activities covered (10 percent or more higher). Highlights included greater attribution of LSAMP's impact

¹ Institutional Research Consultants, Ltd. (IRC) www.irc-evaluation.com is an independent evaluation research firm located in central Ohio.

on activities aiding the transition of URM STEM students transferring from two-year to four-year institutions (up 26%), training programs for peer mentors (up 25%), STEM or professional conferences and training programs for faculty mentors (both up 18%), and tutoring and supplemental instruction in non-STEM courses (up 17%).

Additional findings emphasize the positive impacts of LSAMP programming, activities, and strategies that support the achievement of the alliance's six objectives:

- Eighty-three percent of respondents had experience mentoring URM students (42% did so regularly) reflecting a continued high level of faculty and staff involvement in mentoring LSAMP-eligible students. Approximately half (49-57%) gave high ratings to faculty mentors' ability to explore career paths/graduate school options with mentees, instruct mentees on study skills/time management issues, train mentees in skills needed by STEM professionals, monitor mentees' academic progress and challenges, and their overall effectiveness mentoring this group of students. Slightly fewer viewed faculty as highly prepared to help mentees connect with needed resources (44%) and teach skills related to conducting research (40%). Notably, only 28 percent of the respondents perceived faculty mentors as well equipped to help mentees manage financial stress or assist them with mental health/social isolation issues. This year, those less active in LSAMP (the majority were faculty) were significantly more likely to be personally involved in faculty mentoring (69% versus 41% of those with LSAMP leadership roles).
- Faculty/staff respondents gave the highest priority to professional development on how to help mentees deal with issues of racism, discrimination, and bullying (69%), followed by assisting mentees with mental health/social isolation issues (62%), career exploration and graduate school planning (60%), academic progress and challenges (59%), and student professionalization (57%). Just under half wanted training to strengthen their knowledge of the skills students need to conduct research and manage financial stress (49%) and assist mentees with study skills and time management (48%).
- Overall opinion about The Ohio LSAMP Alliance website was more favorable this year, reflecting an improved user experience from recent upgrades. Ninety-eight percent agreed it was easy to navigate the site and find needed information (compared to only 81% and 69%, respectively, on the 2019 survey). This year, most respondents confirmed that the information and resources were useful to students (97%) as well as themselves (93%), visually engaging (93%), content reflects alliance successes to various stakeholder groups (92%), and articles are well written and up-to-date (86%). Notably, more than three-quarters (79%) agreed the website had a sufficient level of interactivity with social media compared to only 35 percent of respondents previously.
- Respondents reaffirmed their positive opinions of The Ohio LSAMP Alliance leadership and management. All confirmed that they received answers to their questions about LSAMP, data and information requests are reasonable, and that the leadership team is effectively managing the project and addressing partners' needs. Ninety-six percent indicated the weekly *Ohio LSAMP Alliance Insider* newsletter is helpful. All 27 who confirmed steering committee attendance indicated that the information provided is useful, the online format was effective, and the meetings have been a worthwhile use of their time. Steering committee members agreed that their questions about LSAMP were answered and that the meetings were well organized and gave them a better understanding of alliance plans for achieving its objectives. Ninety-three percent viewed the number of annual meetings as reasonable.

- Opinions were mixed as to whether the summer bridge/early arrival programs, held remotely in 2020 due to the pandemic, achieved the goals that in-person programming did in prior years. While the respondents confirmed that the virtual summer bridge familiarized students to learning in an online environment, strengthened their math skills, helped them build relationships with faculty and peers, and informed students about campus resources, they also acknowledged the limitations of this format. Respondents found that non-academic social interaction and bonding between students could not be replicated at some institutions, zoom fatigue impacted attention and participation, and students with limited technology and/or internet were disadvantaged in the remote learning setting.

Respondents' recommendations on ways to improve implementation of The Ohio LSAMP Alliance in Year 4 of the continuation are synthesized below:

Communication and Website

- ✓ Check distribution list of weekly *Insider* newsletter to verify all current steering committee members and coordinators are receiving it. Add a subscriber link for the *Insider* to the alliance website.
- ✓ Add a prominent "Click Here" button to landing page of LSAMP Alliance website linked to a one-step e-form that students fill out to inquire or enroll in LSAMP. These queries would then be forwarded for timely response by the applicable partner institution.
- ✓ Fill out the content of "Courses/Workshops" and "Faculty Mentor" webpages.
- ✓ Share data on student progress, enrollment, and graduation with partners.
- ✓ Continue to use virtual format for group-based industrial projects and to involve industry partners when they cannot come to campus.

Steering Committee Meetings

- ✓ Offer training sessions to program coordinators at end of steering committee meetings.
- ✓ Plan for longer meetings as they often go overtime.
- ✓ Allot more time to sharing best practices.

Faculty Mentoring

- ✓ Provide more direction to faculty mentors on interacting with mentees, best practices, template of topics and activities they could be doing with mentees.
- ✓ Have more systematic follow up with faculty expressing interest in mentoring students.
- ✓ Offer faculty mentors training on issues specific to URM STEM students.
- ✓ Offer faculty mentors training on helping students with mental health, financial issues, applying to graduate school, and life skills in general.

Summer Bridge

- ✓ Ensure that technical assistance is readily available.
- ✓ Increase role of student leaders, interactivity in summer bridge activities.
- ✓ Prepare change-up activities to alleviate Zoom fatigue.
- ✓ Engage more faculty to facilitate small groups.
- ✓ Have more small group discussions in breakout rooms.
- ✓ Create "virtual roommates" to facilitate connection amongst students.

Budgeting

- ✓ Adjust budget carryover mechanism to extend the date of the prior year subcontract to enable institutions to spend unused prior year funds during first quarter of subsequent year.

The external evaluation ongoing monitoring of trend data helps to demonstrate LSAMP's progress and stability over time. Notably, as practices beneficial to URM student success become increasingly institutionalized and an integral part of available support services, it is likely there will be less attribution to LSAMP. Correspondingly, LSAMP's priorities are likely to shift as objectives are met and others emerge as needing extra attention. During the 2020-2021 year, LSAMP faculty and staff exhibited a high level of commitment to assisting STEM URM students navigate a very trying time of societal disruption due to COVID-19. They adapted quickly to virtual learning and communication challenges throughout this period and either maintained or expanded support activities as their overall comfort and facility with online conferencing and remote teaching grew during the pandemic.

The 2020 faculty/staff survey responses show clear evidence that those most involved in LSAMP are encouraging URM student participation in multiple, ongoing ways and that this support is having positive impacts on the targeted students. The data also confirms that faculty and staff who are not quite as active in the grant are open to becoming more engaged with LSAMP Scholars and desirous of training to equip them to do so more effectively. With upward trends toward institutionalization at the partner campuses, The Ohio LSAMP Alliance is in an opportune position to expand its pool of effective faculty mentors, strengthen recruitment and research, and increase the already significant positive impacts the initiative is having on the retention and academic success of URM STEM students at its 10 partner institutions.