Research Assistant Job Fair:
Connecting Graduate Students with Undergraduate Research Assistants
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Goals
Graduate students often struggle to locate dedicated undergraduate research assistants; simultaneously many undergraduate students are unaware of research opportunities on campus.

I organized a job fair focused on recruiting undergraduate research assistants. It was held in April 2016 during UC Davis's annual Undergraduate Research Week. In addition to facilitating research collaborations, graduate students gained experience in science communication by presenting their early stage research before it was ready for presentation at scientific meetings. Undergraduate attendees learned about the variety of research at UC Davis and began to find their own purpose and direction within the academic milieu.

This type of conceptual exposure is limited in undergraduate coursework and provides an opportunity for students to develop valuable research interpretation skills. This research fair complemented current resources provided by the URC and Aggie Job Link.

How do grad students and postdocs recruit undergrad now?
- The Undergraduate Research Center
- If you TAA a large class
- Email blast entire undergraduate majors

A preliminary survey of graduate students in the life science programs on campus revealed that:
- 65% had never hired an undergraduate.
- 50% were unaware that students could work for course credit
- 45% felt unable to locate high quality students

Research Positions
- Both paid and for credit opportunities
- On campus, off campus, and out of state work
- Lab based, and field based
- Topics from Evolutionary Genomics to Wetland Restoration

Did Graduate students and Postdocs employ research posters?
- Allowing the poster to be optional increased beginning stage graduate student participation
- Posters were key to facilitating scientific discussion

Results
- Over 350 undergraduate students attended

Low effort:
- On average, each graduate student or post doc recruited more than 12 applicants
- Undergraduate applicants surveyed 30 research opportunities between classes

High impact:
- Graduate students and post docs gained experience communicating their research posters to a diverse audience
- Undergraduate students learned about ongoing research programs and research findings on campus.

Future Directions
Effort is already underway to integrate this job fair as a biannual event through the Graduate Group in Ecology!

- Schedule in accordance with quarterly registration for credit (Fall) and summer research opportunities (Spring)
- Make abstracts of research available prior to the event
- Either make it bigger or maintain a narrow scope

*The majority of critical feedback concerned the breadth of research topics and interest overlap.

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Project Title: "Research Assistant Job Fair: Connecting Graduate Students with Undergraduate Research Assistants."

Project Summary:

Graduate students often struggle to locate dedicated undergraduate research assistants; simultaneously many undergraduate students are unaware of research opportunities on campus. A survey of graduate students (n=60) in the life science programs revealed that: 65% had never hired an undergraduate, 50% were unaware that students could work for course credit, and 45% felt unable to locate high quality students. Respondents current methods for recruiting assistants are: emailing entire undergraduate majors, recruiting students directly from classes they TA, and word of mouth. Simultaneously, undergraduate students who would benefit from research experience struggle to find positions. A survey of Environmental Sciences undergraduate majors (n=125) revealed less than 20% of the students had considered research, 15% had heard of the URC, and only 10% felt equipped to locate research positions interesting to them on campus. It is apparent that this disconnect exists for graduate students in the life sciences research on campus.

To address this and facilitate the job search, I organized a two-hour job fair focused on recruiting undergraduate research assistants. It was held in April 2016 during UD Davis’s annual Undergraduate Research Week. Over 350 undergraduate students attended, seeking research opportunities on campus. Informal interviews revealed that some students attended simply to learn more about what research is going on on campus. Thirty-two graduate student and postdoctoral researchers hired for 68 jobs and presented their research. They recruited on average 12 students for formal interviews later. Research posters were used to demonstrate the scope of research, and facilitated scientific discussion. However, the poster requirement was optional in an effort to increase beginning stage graduate student participation. In addition to facilitating research collaborations, graduate students gained experience in science communication by presenting their early stage research before it was ready for presentation at scientific meetings. Undergraduate attendees learned about the variety of research at UC Davis, and began to find their own purpose and direction within the academic milieu. This type of conceptual exposure is limited in undergraduate coursework, and provides an opportunity for students to develop valuable research interpretation skills. This research fair complimented current resources provided by the URC and Aggie Job link.

The benefit of this style of event was clear. In order to streamline it, narrowing the scope of research being presented is suggested. The primary critical feedback concerned the breadth of research topics and interest overlap. Presenters whose research fell outside the umbrella “life sciences” term, felt as though the number of students who attended that were interested in their sub discipline were too few. In future iterations, I suggest it is scheduled biannually in accordance with quarterly registration for credit (Fall) and summer research opportunities (Spring). Additionally, having abstracts of the research jobs available before the event was requested by numerous undergraduates, either because they could not attend but still wanted to apply, or to identify which opportunities were most inline with their interests. This event was quite exciting, and I look forward to continuing my work on it to make it a recurring event.

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