Our SURF Program has grown in size (number of participants) by approximately 50% in the last decade (Figure 1). The increase can be attributed to increased demand (the number of Smith students reporting in these sciences has increased from approximately 30% to 40% of all undergraduates in approximately the same period); greater emphasis on undergraduate research in the sciences curriculum (this is part of a shift in pedagogy toward more student-centered, high impact practices at Smith and observed more generally, AAC&U, 2011); and success and greater reach—to support summer undergraduate research in a series of HH grants to Smith College (with expanded funding available to support SURF stipends). While we want Smith science students who can earn a Master of Science degree to consider careers in research, we also want to support student engagement in the sciences curriculum. This can be supported in a variety of ways, including recruiting to the SURF Program, providing financial support for students, and offering mentorship and research opportunities.

As its first principle of excellence, the Association of American Colleges and Universities’ (AAC&U) Liberal Education & America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative calls for “highly qualified, well-prepared faculty members to engage in scholarly research and creative activities; and the development of new courses and programs of study that can be offered that would complement and reinforce the work that individual faculty members do with their students” at their institutions.

SIZE AS AN AIM AND AS A CHALLENGE

As the size of the SURF Program has grown, faculty availability to supervise undergraduate researchers under existing arrangements has become more and more of a concern for us. There is a long and strong tradition in the sciences at Smith of faculty and undergraduate collaboration on research. Now, there is a growing sense of apprehension among the number of students applying for places on the SURF Program. In recent years, student demand has begun to outstrip supply by 20-25%, i.e. 15-20 student requests with a waiting list each year are unable to be admitted as SURF participants.

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