**Webinar Summary of**

**Undergraduate Research and Civic Engagement**

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Dr. Graham Peaslee, Professor of Physics, Environmental Science and Chemistry, Hope College

Dr. Beth Blissman, Director of the Bonner Center for Service & Learning, Oberlin College

Recorded live on Monday, April 6, 2015 at 4PM

To listen to the recording: ([Link here](https://albioncollege.webex.com/albioncollege/ldr.php?RCID=a8376dc529c81852b15d0e7133ef2ba9))

Brief Description: This webinar will feature the values and challenges of research projects with a specific focus on serving the community. Drs Drury, Peaslee and Blissman will present examples of undergraduate research projects from their respective colleges that have a particular focus on civic engagement. They will make suggestions on how to make connections within the community to begin these types of collaborative projects.

Webinar Outline: The webinar started with a brief definition of civic engagement:

Civic engagement is “working to make a difference in the life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”  
(Ehrlich, 2000)

Civic engagement focuses on the improvement of life within the community and addressing the public concerns. While closely related, civic engagement and service learning are not identical; civic engagement can be thought of the umbrella term that includes service learning. ([APA website](http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement.aspx)) There are several reasons to pursue civic engagement. First, it helps to promote the habits of citizenship in students (See *A Crucible Moment* for more information.) Secondly, civic engagement helps us to develop a deeper understanding of the public and moral issues that the world is facing today. Civic engagement can also tap into the motivation of students to make the world a better place for everyone. Lastly, it develops problem-solving, decision making and teamwork skills; all skills that employers are seeking in new graduates. There are broad benefits to students within the liberal arts setting.

The presenters went on to outline three specific examples of how undergraduate research can be combined with civic engagement. Dr. Drury described a First Year Experience course entitled “A Gentleman and a Citizen: Engaging the Liberal Arts, Community, and Profession.” Students spent six weeks on introductory readings on citizenship and community engagement. The students then had a dialogue to determine what form their project would take. They settled on moderating several campus discussions on the issue of mental health modeled on the “Text, Talk, Act” initiative. ([link](http://www.creatingcommunitysolutions.org/texttalkact)) The students partnered with Counseling Services at Wabash, wrote individual research papers and participated in a peer-review process. The project culminated in an event on campus where their peers came and had a public dialogue. Students reported high levels of satisfaction with the project.

Dr. Peaslee then discussed a research project that he started at Hope College many years ago in order to better understand some of the environmental challenges of Holland’s local Lake Macatawa and the surrounding watershed. Lake Mac is a small lake that feeds into Lake Michigan. Over many years, Dr. Peaslee and other faculty, and many students did research on a wide range of topics including sediment run off, agricultural waste and soil erosion, and DNA fingerprinting of microbial pollutants in the lake. Students were required to work with local governments to obtain permits, meet with local water boards and learn to write reports that could be understood by a wide range of people. Based on the final report, a restoration plan was developed and over $9 million (of a $12 million budget) has been raised to date to implement the remediation of the lake. The project has a major focus on public/private partnership. ([link](http://macatawaclarity.org)) Students feel like they have made a difference and are drawn to this type of project.

Dr. Blissman then described Oberlin College’s efforts to institutionalize community-engaged research. The Bonner Center for Service & Learning supports curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programming. ([link](http://new.oberlin.edu/office/bonner-center/index.dot)) The Center has over 20 interdisciplinary, community based learning courses for this year. The Center piloted a project in the summer of 2014 for Community-Engaged Research Fellows to develop a more institutionalized community-based summer research program. Dr. Blissman described some of the successes and challenges of the pilot program and how they are moving forward with the project in the coming year.

The webinar concluded with questions from the attendees and a reiteration of the many benefits that students gain from these types of research experiences.

**GLCA Webinar: Civic Engagement and Undergraduate Research**

**References and Readings**

*This bibliography is derived from a 2014 GLCA New Directions Initiative workshop project and was prepared by Jennifer Abbott, Todd McDorman, Jeffrey P. Mehltretter Drury, Sara A. Mehltretter Drury, and Jill Lamberton, Wabash College. questions/contact:* [*drurys@wabash.edu*](mailto:drurys@wabash.edu)

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