



4-24-2018

Examining Alumni Perceptions of Social and Cultural Capital Accumulation Through Ursinus's Summer Fellows Program

Sydney Dickson

Ursinus College, sydickson@ursinus.edu

Adviser: Lauren Wynne

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/anth_hon

 Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Liberal Studies Commons](#)

Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Dickson, Sydney, "Examining Alumni Perceptions of Social and Cultural Capital Accumulation Through Ursinus's Summer Fellows Program" (2018). *Anthropology Honors Papers*. 1.

https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/anth_hon/1

This Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthropology Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact aprock@ursinus.edu.

Sydney Dickson
Examining Alumni Perceptions of Social and Cultural Capital Accumulation through Ursinus's
Summer Fellows Program
Anthropology & Sociology
Mentor: Lauren Wynne

Abstract

A common offering among undergraduate institutions is an intensive summer research program, which allows students to complete a project independently without any other academic obligations. These programs are designed to foster useful skills, valuable relationships, and scholarly work. Ursinus College, a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, has such a program: Summer Fellows. With colleges attempting to appeal to a decreasing number of high-achieving applicants, student desire to pursue intellectual interests, and employers looking for skilled job candidates, it is worthwhile to examine the perceived efficacy of this program. This paper utilizes the perspectives of alumni reflecting on what they gained from Summer Fellows now that they have entered the professional world. The benefits they described include skills, dispositions, and social relationships that are developed by utilizing the resources provided to overcome the uncomfortable nature of the process of finishing a sound, scholarly project. These benefits are categorized as a form of social, cultural, or symbolic capital, which is accumulated throughout the program and then translated from the academic setting of Summer Fellows into various professional fields. This paper is not about whether the program works, but about how alumni (and students) perceive the program's impact on their professional lives.

Introduction

The decision to enroll in higher education is an expensive, yet popular decision for many young adults in the United States. In fall 2014, 20.2 million Americans were enrolled in a degree-granting institution, an increase of 17% since 2004 (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2016). When students were asked about the motivations behind this choice, 86.1 percent said that they saw it as a way to a better job. 82.2 percent also said they found education to be a way to pursue personal intellectual interests (Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA 2014:38). With a recovering economy, increasing tuition rates, substantial nationwide student debt, and a gradually decreasing number of young adults earning degrees, lower-ranked institutions must compete for highly qualified students by advertising opportunities that will give them an edge in the professional and academic worlds. Students search for opportunities that they believe will make them successful in their careers and make their investment in an institution worthwhile.

Intensive, independent summer research programs are fairly widespread among undergraduate institutions – the goal is to provide students with research experience that prepares them for graduate studies and encourages highly motivated students to complete a project in an unstructured timeline. The independent nature of such programs fosters fundamental skills that are useful to them in the professional world, which makes them a selling point for many schools. However, very little research has been done to show prospective students how these programs are useful to a student after they graduate. Alumni provide a useful perspective in determining what skills they develop through these programs and how they are useful to students after they leave the institution. In turn, the institution benefits from positive reflections from alumni as they continue to build and maintain these programs and advertise them to prospective students.

Ursinus College, a small liberal arts college located outside of Philadelphia, offers a summer undergraduate research program of its own to provide students with competitive research experience: Summer Fellows. The literature on the subject of undergraduate research outcomes is sparse, which makes this project profoundly important to Ursinus College and contributes a new case study to the current literature. Given that I found the experience to be helpful to me as I transitioned into my final year of undergraduate education, and that colleges are competing for high-achieving students by offering such programs, it is worthwhile to see how Ursinus alumni reflect on their experiences now that they have experience in the professional world with their college degrees. How do alumni, from anywhere less than one year to 18 years post-graduation, perceive the nature of the benefit of their participation in Summer Fellows? How did the program work for them?

These reflections are not only useful to the College in the admissions process, but are also helpful in maintaining and improving the program itself. The College and the students make substantial investments in this program: the College invests money, and faculty, staff, and students invest time and energy to complete eight weeks of new and intensive research each year. Fellows dedicate a large portion of their summer to it, sometimes sacrificing other employment, internships, and recreation to spend hours in the lab and the library. For many students, it is their first time working on an academic research project all their own. It is a novel challenge to spend eight hours of the day in the lab fine-tuning physical skills or to construct an entire project from a basic theme or question. Not only is it a substantial amount of work to carry out the project, but it is also up to the students to structure their time and produce innovative, scholarly work. This makes the process uncomfortable for students because it pushes them to work intensely on one project for a designated period of time. However, the opportunity to conduct this level of research is

advantageous to students as they continue with coursework and eventually try to set themselves apart as a competitive candidate for positions in the professional world. The College thinks so, too. As efforts increase to attract high-achieving high school students to the College, the Admissions Office has considered offering a guaranteed spot in the program with certain scholarship awards. The program is often described as a springboard for those who want to pursue Honors projects in their senior year and who are thinking about graduate studies.

Because research is a vital component of nearly all disciplines, it is necessary to review the way students extrapolate necessary skills and knowledge from undergraduate research experiences. Natural science students need meticulous laboratory skills to conduct accurate experiments. For researchers in the medical field, one small mistake could be detrimental to a patient's health. Chemists also need to ensure that they are performing experiments accurately down to infinitesimal fractions. For humanities subjects such as philosophy, scholars pursue questions of morality, knowledge, and reality - and produce theories with which we explain all aspects of our lives and ways of thinking. In the social sciences, such as anthropology and sociology, research is an indispensable tool to explore and explain societal phenomena and learn about different peoples of the world. Ethnographic studies provide a scientific description of the customs, habits, and characteristics of the different societies and cultures of the world. Former Fellows span all sorts of careers, including medical scribing, counseling in a mental health residential program, completing research abroad as a Fulbright or Watson Fellow, working for AmeriCorps, or even coming back to work at Ursinus as a professor. Regardless of the field they find themselves in now, the participants in this program found the experience of conducting research to be valuable in their respective careers. This program, being open to all majors, provides an ideal setting to examine the perceived benefit of conducting research as an undergraduate.

Literature Review

Although the literature on the topic of undergraduate research opportunities is not vast, there are a few studies which assess outcomes. A cross-disciplinary study of undergraduate research opportunities found that, broadly, these opportunities are perceived to be beneficial to students across a wide span of majors. This study, conducted by Chris Craney et al., found that students in certain majors gain particular skills – but the study also found that students who complete research as an undergraduate tend to pursue graduate studies and are more efficient in conducting research, regardless of discipline (2011:93). These programs help students after the experience is finished – making undergraduate research opportunities an appealing feature of many schools. Another study from 2007 with approximately 15,000 respondents analyzes the outcomes of undergraduate research in STEM fields. The researchers claimed “...that UROs [undergraduate research opportunities] increase understanding, confidence, and awareness” and “...the anticipation of a Ph.D.” (Russel, Hancock, and McCullough 2007:548). A number of program participants in the first iteration of this study mentioned that they planned to immediately enter a Ph.D. program after graduating, and wanted this experience to prepare for graduate studies. I wanted to see if these goals line up with what alumni, having completed the same program, go on to do after graduating.

Thus, in assessing outcomes, alumni are a target group. Another study assessed alumni perceptions of undergraduate research, as it must be noted that offering such opportunities is economically important to the school to give them “an edge in recruiting” (Bauer and Bennett 2003:212). In this study, they found that “Colleges and Universities are increasingly calling upon alumni... Alumni opinions of their undergraduate achievement have been found to correlate well with both their perceptions of these achievements as undergraduates and with faculty opinions

about those same achievements” (2003:214). These studies serve as a basis for understanding undergraduate research outcomes, but this study focuses on Ursinus College in particular. The College has not completed a study where they ask alumni to assess this experience in terms of post-graduate opportunities and career trajectory. After analyzing these outcomes, this paper will provide the College with information relating to this program and how it might be improved to further enhance student experience.

Where this study differs from existing studies on the subject is the theoretical framework in which I situate the benefits. I find that the Summer Fellows program provides notable contributions to a student’s social and cultural capital. These concepts of human capital were developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe the valuable qualities and possessions that make a person who they are. The valuable experiences and relationships an individual has influence their disposition and develop a special skillset. Specifically, social capital relates to the network of valuable social relationships a person has – for example, work/internship supervisors and professors can be sources of social capital to a student (Bourdieu 2016:190). Undergraduate research experience also functions as symbolic capital, because a student earns a certain benefit solely by being able to say they were in a prestigious program regardless of their performance in it (2016:187).

Cultural capital is more complicated, and is broken down further into three types – institutionalized, embodied, and objectified. Institutionalized cultural capital includes titles or degrees – such as a Bachelors or Masters. Embodied cultural capital is arguably the most complex – it relates to the dispositions and skills a person embodies based on their experiences. Objectified cultural capital relates to objects that have symbolic value, such as art, jewelry, or books (2016:185). Using this theoretical framework, I ascribe a value to the benefits gained (namely

skills, dispositions, and valuable relationships) from participation in the program by categorizing them as a form of capital.

Sociologist George Herbert Mead is also useful in outlining community building and individual development. He states that “The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience... We are finding out what we are going to say, what we are going to do, by saying and doing, and in the process we are continually controlling the process itself” (2016:455). Because of the emphasis placed on close interaction with professors and other high-achieving students in a confined space, this molds the individual into the role of a researcher. This framework explains the personal changes students undergo throughout the duration of the program. This personal change has to do with the community created during the summer: “It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members” (2016:461). The community, being a group of accredited scholars and hand-selected students, establishes high expectations for the level of work they expect students to complete.

Methodology

In the summer of 2017, as a Summer Fellow myself, I conducted an ethnographic study of the students in the Summer Fellows program. Students in the program were interviewed about prior academic experience and their upbringing in an attempt to observe if certain patterns existed among these students. This study developed out of personal conversations with students who expressed concern about their finances, and needed to work over the summer. Needing to prioritize working over an academic experience demonstrated a flaw in the program’s accessibility that needed to be addressed. This led me to discuss individual student experiences with program

participants: this included questions about their educational background, relationship with their parents, future career goals, and knowledge of personal finances. Although the Student Billing and Financial Aid offices were unable to provide certain financial data due to confidentiality measures, the Institutional Review Board approved general interview questions about family income. At the end of the summer, the data showed that students spanned a wide variety of backgrounds, but the study was not completely adequate in definitively answering the question of accessibility.

Because we were unable to obtain the information necessary to pursue that direction, and because I became interested in the desire expressed by many students to pursue graduate studies or research positions, I decided to investigate the program's perceived efficacy. With this selective and prestigious program being a 21-year-old Ursinus tradition, the job market becoming increasingly competitive, and high anxiety among students about post-graduation plans, I found it to be worthwhile to see how the program helps students in the professional world after graduating. Speaking to alumni from 2000-2017 provided a means of figuring out long-term and short-term positive outcomes of the program after a student has left Ursinus.

Started in 1996, the program invites a select group of rising juniors and seniors each summer to return to Ursinus's campus after a two week break after finals. With just ten student participants in its pilot year, the program now hosts 70-80 students from all disciplines. Participation in this program is now a hallmark Ursinus experience. A fellowship comes with a \$2,500 stipend, a room in a residence hall, one free lunch in the Wismer Center per week (followed by a speaker), and the opportunity to pursue a project full-time (and usually all their own) under the guidance of a faculty member of their choosing. At the end of the program, students present their research during a two-hour symposium.

The summer prior to the start of my senior year, I spent most of my time on campus working on the first installment of this project, and came back confident and ready to file an addendum with the IRB to start targeting new groups for my Honors project. I spent months creating and distributing surveys, conducting interviews, and collecting data in a similar fashion to my work during the summer. The coding, analysis, and writing process began the following spring semester. At this point, I have been working on this project, in some form, for nearly a year. In February 2017, I applied for Summer Fellows with the idea that doing my own research would make me a competitive candidate for Ph.D. programs in anthropology. Having been accepted to three graduate programs, I believe the program was advantageous to me as I matured as a scholar.

In order to understand how this program is helpful to students in achieving post-graduation success, the primary source of information were alumni who have completed the program and had some sort of experience of life after graduation. Alumni, having experience in the professional world after their training at Ursinus, can best speak to which skills they developed are useful and how they translate into their jobs or graduate studies. Current students, both former Fellows and eligible Fellows, were also asked questions relating to their post-graduation goals. Online surveys (Google Forms) and phone and in-person interviews made up the data collection for this project. Once filled out and submitted, the results from the online surveys were automatically plugged into a Google Spreadsheet. Surveys provided a quick, easily searched written record of key demographic information (class year, major, current job/research project, etc.) and also gauged interview interest. Interviews allowed for thick description, which produced richer qualitative data that highlighted personal experience.

For this portion of the study, there were three target groups:

1. Current students who are eligible to participate in Summer Fellows (class of 2021, 2020, and 2019): This group was targeted in an attempt to gauge the extent of interest in the program, determine if any information about the program might be unclear, see whether or not students are sure about applying, and discover the reasons why they have or have not thought about applying.
2. Current students who are former Fellows: Many of these students were aware of the study conducted in the summer and were informed that this is the continuation of that work. These students were asked about their experience in the program, whether or not their post-graduation goals had changed, and what they were currently working on during the semester. Since many of these students are seniors, they were also asked about their Capstone projects or if they were completing an Honors project. The intent in speaking with these groups was to see how students use their experience in the summer to their benefit during the school year, and whether the experience was transformative in terms of their future aspirations.
3. Alumni who are former Fellows: In order to assess long-term outcomes, this group was included in the project. They were asked about their post-graduation career path and what they thought benefitted them most from the program, in addition to other valuable academic experiences they had during their time at Ursinus.

In order to include the two new groups, I scheduled meetings with the Alumni Relations Office and Dean Kelly Sorensen (coordinator and director of Summer Fellows). Alumni are coded within a digital system based on what they were involved in on campus, and an email list of alumni from 2000-2017 who had participated in the programs was pulled. After working out correspondence logistics, I made an online survey for each respective group (for the list of survey

questions, see appendix). Former Fellows, both current students and alumni, were asked to leave their email at the end of the survey if they were interested in completing an interview.

To schedule interviews, I created an anonymized Doodle Poll with available times on various days between November and December. This link was then sent in an email to each person who left their email on the survey. Alumni interviewees then replied to their email with their phone number or Skype username. Interviews with students were conducted in a private location on campus wherever the student was most comfortable. A small number of alumni were currently employed by the College, and were interviewed in their offices.

In total, 85 alumni, 22 current student/former Fellows, and 29 current student/eligible Fellows responded to the surveys. Six current students and 28 alumni were interviewed. Interviews with students were recorded with a cell phone. Interviews with alumni were not recorded, but notes were taken. These notes were coded to look for patterns and themes to pursue for further analysis.

Defining Human Capital

Certain relationships and aspects of cultural capital are only valuable in certain fields. In the context of this project, academia is a major field – but cultural and social capital gained in the context of this particular program are being examined in the context of the professional world at large. Therefore, direct and indirect benefits translate into both social and cultural capital: students build relationships with their professors and develop particular skills in this setting that help them as they transition into the professional world.

To a lesser degree, Summer Fellows contributes to a student's economic capital; but, because the stipend is \$2,500 directly deposited into the students' bank accounts, it does not warrant being classified as a substantial contribution to economic capital. Bourdieu describes economic capital mostly as being investments and property – the stipend, as it is more of a liquid

asset, serves well as a temporary, short-term benefit, not as economic capital (2016:185). It is possible, however, that participating in Summer Fellows might contribute to economic capital in the future, because the particular cultural and social capital that is developed during the program can be converted later into economic capital. Alumni with greater cultural and social capital are more competitive job candidates and have stronger social connections in the professional world, which leads to better job positions. The symbolic capital earned from the experience itself can also be converted into economic capital, because having the experience advertised on a résumé intrigues employers, and might lead to an interview and possible employment.

Disclaimer on “Success” and Post-Graduation Outcomes

This study cannot speak to whether completing Summer Fellows leads to success after graduation. Firstly, this would demand that “success” be defined, which is difficult given the diversity of human experience. Success, as it is being observed in this study, is relative to the individual and their lived experiences. Simply put, there are many different directions one can go in after graduating, and success in the context of career satisfaction and utility of an experience is left to be subjectively defined by the participants in the project. Interviews focused on what aspects of the program alumni found to be useful to them after graduating, instead of whether they are satisfied in their current job. Attempting to force one definition of success is therefore limiting of individual meaning, which is not productive in analyzing the perception of benefit that this study explores. Definitions of success will not be explicitly interrogated in the analysis of the collected data, as there is not a uniform definition for this study and they are not essential to the research questions. The goal of conducting this research was to see how the capital extrapolated from this particular program was perceived to be valuable in the professional world as a whole, in its various segments.

Findings

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Summer Fellows is perceived to be a beneficial experience for students in their pursuits after graduating from Ursinus, whether they choose to enroll in a graduate program or enter the job market. The challenges presented by participating in Summer Fellows (i.e. completing independent scholarly research full-time for the first time) make the process uncomfortable in nature, which results in the concentrated development of academic skills (cultural capital) and valuable social relationships (social capital). This capital enables Fellows to complete the project and is a benefit that they carry with them into the professional world.

The codes created and used for this data set which are most related to the analysis include the following terms: direct/indirect benefit, resource, and career (defined below in Figure A). As stated before, with the data collected, it is not appropriate to make a statement regarding whether the program is beneficial, nor to say who it is beneficial for. However, it is generally assumed to be a positive or useful academic experience for a student to participate in. There is little risk of loss – students are compensated monetarily for their time and energy. In spite of the argument that some jobs might be a higher source of income for the summer, the stipend helps to offset the student’s living costs and the experience itself has value – which is what this paper explores. Therefore, in discussing perceived “benefits,” direct and indirect benefits are what eventually translate into social or cultural capital.

Figure A

Code	Definition
Direct benefit	A benefit from the program that is directly related to the fact that a student participated in the program.

Indirect benefit	The useful skills and dispositions that a student develops through participation in the program.
Resource	People or materials that helped a student complete the program and get through new challenges they encountered.
Career	Statements about the current job position the alumnus/alumna holds, their daily tasks and responsibilities, or indications of shifting career trajectories. Graduate studies are also included in this code.

Direct benefits include using summer research in an Honors project, getting a letter of recommendation from your advisor, graduate school acceptance/obtaining another research fellowship, publications, presentation experience, and the stipend. It is evident that many factors go into graduate school acceptance and being awarded a fellowship. However, advertising this experience on a curriculum vitae or resume provided many interviewees the opportunity to show they had research experience, which many claim made them a more competitive candidate. Therefore, it is included in the direct benefit category.

Indirect benefits include a variety of skills and the development of personal characteristics that were useful to Fellows long-term. An abbreviated list of indirect benefits include effective time management, developing research models and methodology, self-discovery or shifting career trajectory, intellectual stimulation, exploration of personal experience, communication skills, confidence, and learning from failure. Indirect and direct benefits are sometimes related, which will be discussed case by case.

The second two codes, “resource” and “career,” relate to what the program has to offer and what the post-graduation outcomes are. “Resources,” usually, were faculty mentors; but also include peers. These people constitute a support system that aids the student in their personal and intellectual growth, which is a large part of what makes the experience worthwhile. The

community gathered for this program constitutes a generalized other, which establishes the expectations students are supposed to reach. The stipend is also being included as a resource, as it enables many students to pursue an eight-week long project with a reduced need to earn money through other employment. “Career” is interpreted broadly to indicate significant moments in career trajectory. Sometimes “graduate school” was used in a similar fashion – these terms were used to mark events such as first jobs or realizations of desired career paths. Reflecting on my own experience, I found that the parts of my own experience that were most meaningful to me resonated with many of the things alumni also mentioned. This helped in developing the codes used and defining what benefits constitute a form of capital.

The Uncomfortable Nature of the Process

For many students, particularly those in the humanities, social sciences, and arts, Summer Fellows is the first truly independent research project they have carried out. Students have likely completed semester-long projects required for a class, but these are not of the same caliber as Summer Fellows; semester-long projects often have guidelines and are based on a topic relating in some way to the course. The instructor is expecting something specific and is grading the student based on the work they produce. These projects are also smaller in scale, because full-time students take an average of 16 credits per semester (sometimes as low as 12, but sometimes more than 16). An Ursinus student enrolled in 16 credits is in four courses, which may also include a for-credit internship. Regardless of what the student is involved in, a class project is distinct from Summer Fellows research. Students complete a plethora of different projects during the summer – they can take (and have taken) the form of a pop-up shop to showcase a student’s artwork, an entire day in the lab working on a professor’s research on the tail regeneration of axolotls, or an analysis of lesbian themes in old childhood cartoons.

What makes Summer Fellows different is that it is full-time, offers monetary compensation, is not graded, and is often very independent in nature; many students (particularly those outside of the natural sciences) create their own project to work on. They and their faculty mentor set the guidelines for what they want to research, how they want to go about it, and what they want the finished product to look like. Often, these are some of the longest papers students have written in their undergraduate experience: papers may range from eight to 70 pages, seeming to generally fall around 20-50. Ultimately, the only requirement for the summer is that each student submit some sort of paper at the end of the program to be posted in the Digital Commons, and give a poster or presentation at the symposium on the last day of the program. There is also a pressure to complete this work and meet the standards set by the generalized other – in this case, the intellectual community gathered for the summer. Students have eight weeks of largely unstructured time to finish these tasks and achieve their own goals, which they accomplish by meeting frequently with their faculty mentors and working around other students also struggling to produce their finest academic work. It is an uncomfortable process that presents new challenges for students, and they must overcome them using the resources they have available to guide them through the process.

Unstructured Time

This structure presents a novel challenge for students. Many current students, having just gone through the process, explained how difficult it was to manage their time and figure out what they wanted their projects to look like. Multiple students also discussed how their project shifted over time, or grew organically into something they didn't expect. A female humanities student described her project's disciplinary transition as a learning experience:

When I started I thought I would be doing politics and ended up in the religious sphere, so I'm glad I followed the logical steps instead of forcing the project to be something it wasn't going to be.

Another student, a female in the social sciences, expressed during the summer that her project had also shifted organically into a very interdisciplinary route:

I've been talking to professors from all these other disciplines, like, trying to collect this grand list of source material... it's been this really great, like, interdepartmental collaboration.

Time management was a notable part of both student and alumni interviews. For current students, it presented (and remained) a challenge as they continue into their academic semester. The span of eight weeks with little official structure proves to be difficult for certain students. A humanities and social science student described her struggle to manage her time:

Um, well... I will admit, for the first four weeks, absolutely I just... fucked around. I did not do jack shit. I think I read two books in that first month. Then I was like 'okay, four weeks have passed, and I literally have nothing.' And, um, so skills that I learned were... you can't expect time management to just happen. You can't trust yourself to just do things on time if you're not going to rigidly structure it out. Like I am someone who needs due dates.

Of course, other students did not struggle as much with motivation; however, they still struggled in other ways. One alumna, who majored in theater and communication studies, described feeling isolated by the lack of people on campus and living in a single room. A few also noted that presenting at the symposium was anxiety-inducing, saying even saying "It was probably the most nerve-wracking experience of my life." In addition, many students change their projects dramatically over the course of the summer – this then presents major time constraints. Adding, subtracting, or modifying parts of a project requires a substantial amount of time and energy. Because this is the first time students are doing research at this level, they often realize that there is only so much that can be done in a summer, and that it is best to "let it go where it goes." They also might realize that their interests change. Multiple students, usually those outside of the natural

sciences, refocus their projects around something interesting that they find along the way, or they find that their project is not working out the way they planned. Alumni also echoed this sentiment, saying often that their faculty advisor "...challenged me to learn things outside of my comfort zone."

Some students manage to remain grounded through the entire duration of the program, and use it as an opportunity to pursue their intellectual interests and change their mind without any repercussions. When a female humanities major found that something was not working out for her, she just rerouted the project and worked with what the information was telling her:

I think it was very laid back but still serious. I was never expecting like a super easy program, but you know I expected something laid back, I expected it to be what it was, for you to focus on what you were interested in, to change the design. I learned to be very adaptable to change.

In my own experience, being adaptable helped me to be successful. In the Anthropology/Sociology Department at Ursinus, we are often told during long projects, such as an Honors project or Summer Fellows project, to let the data speak for itself. After being denied access to certain information, I had to think of a way to follow the project based on what I wanted to do. If I could not get information from the school, I could ask students for self-reported data. I was then dependent on the IRB to conclude that the questions I wanted to ask were appropriate. Even though I could not directly address accessibility, I was ultimately able to determine that there was some degree of diversity among the students in the program – versus seeing a more consistent pattern of privilege.

Participating in the Intellectual Community

A common highlight of the experience that is mentioned when reflecting on the program are the faculty/student lunches and the speaker series. During lunches, students gather with faculty

members in the dining hall and talk over their meals. Topics of discussion are not limited to research: they are about post-graduation plans, academic coursework, jobs, campus events, vacations, families, and pets. Students often utilize this time to get advice on their projects or ask professors about their research. A current humanities student said that she received reading suggestions from professors in three different disciplines after a few lunches with other students and their advisors.

There is an inherent power dynamic in a professor-student relationship, because high school students are expected to be submissive to the adult staff in schools. It can be jarring for students to realize that professors are willing to engage students' interests on a deeper level. Students need to be aware that office hours are for their use; professors want them to come in and talk, and that professors do like to get to know their students outside of the classroom. A male alumnus who studied physics and math described the casual nature of his relationships with his professors:

Yeah, we still keep in touch. The professors in the physics department, like... they would sit you down and talk to you. We're on a first name basis. They go out of their way to become friends with all of the students in a way that they don't have to... They encourage you so much.

Summer Fellows would not still be a program if professors were not willing to help students conduct research. However, this is a new type of relationship that students must grow accustomed to in order to fully engage their own intellectual interests with accredited scholars.

These points of discomfort are stimuli for change. The students are all in the same program, and they struggle through similar things – this is immensely conducive to building a supportive, engaged community. There are numerous resources that the program provides to students to facilitate the process, which incites students to be vulnerable and to grow from the hardships they face.

The Resources Available to Overcome Discomfort

With the advantage of only working with one or two students per summer, professors become a solid support base for the students they work with. A vast majority of the participants in this study spoke fondly of their faculty advisors – they also had personal anecdotes and explained how their relationship continued outside of Summer Fellows and outside of Ursinus:

And so, I got to work really closely with [faculty]. And, basically, when I think about my experiences and the memorable stuff I did while I was there, uh it's really related to the independent research... he had a tradition with all of his core students, those working on Honors theses and capstone courses... where he wanted us to get a good feeling and understanding for what it was like to work in the world of diplomacy. He would often have us over for dinner, usually about six students, where he would cook elaborate, crazy meals that nobody would have had before.

Alumni will also keep in touch with these mentors, even if they graduated years ago. One alumna stated that she still keeps in touch with one of her faculty advisors, who also invited her students out for a meal at the end of the semester. Some faculty members were also mentioned multiple times during interviews.

Other than the instrumental role of the professors, students also found solace among each other. An alumna who majored in theater and media studies described how her classmates made her feel less isolated:

I loved summer fellows, but I found it a bit difficult for it to be quiet on campus. For me to be doing a project that I wasn't sure of what it would turn into, to sit there and self-motivate myself, was really tough for me. It was a little isolating. It was also isolating to live in a single. I went to the library one day, and was sitting with two classmates, and I was like, 'guys I'm not gonna lie, I'm kind of struggling here.' But this is scholarship. They became my support system. It was that first-generation group of students who were navigating the scholarly landscape for the first time.

The Summer Fellows organizers often talk about building an “intellectual community.” Applications which request a substantial amount of time be spent conducting research off-campus are rejected or the applicant is asked to modify their proposal, because the organizers prefer that

students spend more time on campus, doing research at the College. This is also why students are provided a free room on campus. In recent years, students have been assigned rooms in one building – this further fosters a close-knit community, as we shared a living space. After the library closes, common rooms become a place of quiet solidarity as students toil away down the hall from their rooms. Because only one meal per week is provided, this also means students form groups to cook and eat together. All of these situations are opportunities students use to talk about their research. With Ursinus having a small enrollment and the majority of students being in the same class year, it is easy to find conversation topics that everyone can relate to – professors, campus events, student organizations, and academic disciplines.

Being surrounded by people you have known and grown with in the classroom for years is a great source of comfort. This support system becomes immeasurably useful when projects inevitably change and become challenging. This also creates a community of Fellows who encourage each other to produce high-quality work. Given the prestige of the program, students take note of what other students are doing. While it is true that everyone is working with an individualized timeline due to having different projects, everyone is in an eight-week long program with a handful of deadlines. The expectation to produce a solid piece of scholarly work is tangible, and students check in with each other very often:

I heard others were moving forward, so I started to, like, move forward... And everyone, like, I lived next to [student], and they were like ‘oh yeah, I’ve written five pages today.’ And I was like, ‘oh, what?’ and so then I kinda started getting on my stuff.

This community develops because students are relatively isolated for the entire duration of the program. The campus is quiet, there are no classes, and there are only so many buildings students can get into. Because students must apply to the program and it is highly regarded by the College, there is an expectation that the work produced during the summer will be substantial, innovative,

and thorough. Students in this community have these expectations of each other that they assume everyone will reach. Thus, the individual in this community must adhere to these standards, or they will be judged and excluded.

The stipend is also a resource that is helpful for students. Because of the stipend, a lot of students do not have to work quite as hard as they would normally have to, in addition to gaining a valuable academic experience. Even for low-income students, the stipend helps to offset living costs enough to make it a feasible summer position. An alumna, who was a Pell Grant recipient, said that “the stipend was a huge part of why I was able to even think about doing it.” Students are also given an additional budget outside of the stipend for books and materials they might need, and other programming on behalf of the Residence Life Office is available to supply students with food.

The Benefit

Given the scope of this project and the response rate, I had abundant data to work with. I found that students and alumni often faced similar challenges and gained similar skills. There was also a consistency among certain answers within specific disciplines. What I found to be special about the data was the way that each skill came with a very personal anecdote from the participant. It demonstrates that conducting independent research is personally meaningful and dependent on individual experience. These experiences develop cultural and social capital, which alumni then take into the professional world.

Social Capital

By far, the most frequent response that constitutes social capital is the relationship that the student develops with their faculty advisor. Countless alumni and current students mentioned how

significant it was to be able to work so closely with someone, often on personal research. Students likely already have a relationship with the mentor they choose to work with, because the student to faculty ratio is 12:1. This is an opportunity for students to demonstrate to professors that they are capable of completing a project of great scale and allows the professor and student to connect on a more personal level.

I often connected well with alumni when we started to discuss our relationships to our faculty advisors. They are not only a valuable source to answer questions about research, but they also have experience in academia and the professional world. My advisor's advice was crucial for me as I applied to graduate programs; this is also true for many others, who stated that their advisor for Summer Fellows was a go-to person for assistance in applying to both graduate programs and jobs. An alumna who completed an interdisciplinary project spoke fondly of both of her mentors:

Both [faculty] and [faculty] were integral in getting me into my graduate program, and I'm sure had a role in helping me be successful here. When I got a call for an interview, the first person I called was [faculty].

Many alumni, such as the one above, also said that they are still in touch with their old advisors. Some still turn to them for letters of recommendation, despite being away from Ursinus for years. A 2013 graduate shared that she still uses her Ursinus advisors for nearly every recommendation she needs, and that she was "lucky that I had such a great support system."

Being able to work closely with professors is also beneficial to students as they consider career options. Discussing potential job opportunities with a professor can guide students to a career they would not have thought of. An alumna currently working for a financial research and analysis company explained that it was through conversations with an economics faculty member that he realized he wanted to work professionally in finance:

I went down to the [university] job fair... and ended up interviewing for a couple different spots and accepted a job for [company]... I had made a connection with someone. I went

to go work for someone else... but in a very different function. Then there's this long, long history of firms merging, and... about six months later, I ended up joining [company owner] on his team. Four times moved, I've only applied for one job... This [Summer Fellows project] required some ability to connect with people, which is what translated into the multiple jobs over my career.

This story is particularly indicative of the value of social capital, because it demonstrates how the one relationship with a faculty member at Ursinus then progressed into building relationships outside of Ursinus.

Social capital can also be converted to symbolic capital. Some professors might have connections to people in the professional world, which could give a student an advantage applying for a job regardless of their own credentials. This eventually led to the position the alumnus is currently in now. This is not an uncommon narrative, as explained by an alumnus who majored in physics and math and now works for a financial advising company as an analyst:

I had to write formal emails to professors, and learn all these weird outside-of-class things... Relationships from Summer Fellows came in handy later – my boss was involved at Ursinus and knew one of my Summer Fellows supervisors. I can't say that's why I got the job, but I'm sure it didn't hurt.

As evidenced by many alumni, the relationships students develop with their professors are long-lasting and personal. These people then become the source for “glowing letters of recommendation.” Other than this, professors often become a great source of comfort for students as they struggle through their undergraduate education – in both personal and professional ways. Ultimately, students seem to find Ursinus to be a supportive academic community, as evidenced by an alumna who majored in psychology:

Especially when you are undertaking such a big endeavor, I think it's important to have a support system... to know you can always reach out for help... I think your time at Ursinus shows you that you can lean on people, you can ask questions... you can pursue learning for the sake of learning. It was time to be creative and time to foster more qualitative skills... that I can use professionally.

Cultural Capital

Other than social capital, the Summer Fellows program is an invaluable source in the development of embodied cultural capital. Embodied cultural capital encompasses an individual's dispositions, skills, and specialized knowledge which are valuable in a certain field. In working with the data for this project, I had to work with a degree of ambiguity in defining what skills, dispositions, and knowledge constitute cultural capital based on each individual's case. Encompassing cultural capital are the following main themes: time-management, confidence in career trajectory, increased academic research capabilities, self-motivation for independent work, software use, communication skills, and a variety of other inherent personal qualities that they found to be useful in their current jobs.

In the case of one alumna currently working on a graduate degree in a field of neuroscience, Summer Fellows was a transformative period when she realized that conducting research in a lab full-time is what she wanted to continue doing:

So... after I graduated I got a job in psychology, and my plan was to go to graduate school... I learned that I didn't like working in mental health that much... Working in [professor]'s lab got me my research job, which is where I'm working now... Now I'm just a little lab rat. But that's the stuff about research that I liked. Yeah, so, it definitely benefitted me. It got me – you know like, when you're in the semester, and you have all of those things going on – it's not really a realistic view of what research is like in the field. Summer Fellows paints the best picture of that.

Similarly, an alumnus currently working as a data analyst and applying for graduate programs shared that Summer Fellows was indispensable in determining their career trajectory:

I probably don't want to do that [financial work] for the rest of my life... I didn't know what I wanted to do before fellows, and then I found the statistics. I'm going for a Ph.D. because of my project. It was finding out what I actually wanted to do. You don't know you like school until you're away from it.

Their projects gave them the chance to have research be their full-time job in an environment where they had little to lose. Having some familiarity with the process and the confidence in

knowing that they enjoy the process makes them better able to advertise themselves as researchers and enter a Ph.D. program without reservations. Being able to walk into an academic setting and immediately pick up a project and start working on it with some understanding of what methodology works, how the paper should look, and who to work with saves both time and energy.

A natural science major currently rotating through labs in her Ph.D. program exemplifies this:

All that shaped me into the person and the career path I want to go down now... I have the experience of running my own lab. I think that gave me a little bit of an edge up, I'm super comfortable walking into these labs now. It gives me a little bit of extra confidence entering a new laboratory setting.

The same goes for students in the humanities. A male humanities major described how the reverence for his professors that developed over the course of the project was important to him as a researcher: "All I knew was that I loved what I was studying, and I wanted to be like my professors. And it dawned on me that I needed to go to graduate school."

Further, countless alumni and current students also discussed the program's impact on their time management skills. Many stated that managing their time effectively was a great challenge, but then said that it pressured them to structure their own time and taught them how to set reasonable goals. This is evidenced by an alumna who works as a research analyst for a governmental agency, whose job requires her to change projects every nine to 18 months. Due to the quick turnaround, time is an important factor that she must always be cognizant of as she conducts research, and she explained how Summer Fellows helped her adapt to this pace:

Time-management for research projects is a major benefit. I think you know in college just generally you have to figure out how to manage your time a little bit but that is extremely true when it comes to Summer Fellows. There was no required anything. You have to be very motivated and driven and know what needs to get done in order to meet those longer-term deadlines. Professionally, that skill is important to have to be successful... My experience gave me an incredible basis from which to work to understand sort of how to construct research which can be carried out within certain constraints.

Self-motivation was another popular answer when asking about benefits, which also assists in time management. Motivated students are willing to put the necessary time and energy into the project. If students want to perform at the level the community expects them to reach, then they will press themselves to put the maximum effort into the project. An alumna who majored in theater and communication studies described how the program pushed her as a student:

It helped, ultimately, me be more self-motivated. It made me ultimately a better scholar. It was that training that lead me to a deeper meaning... I was still searching for some of those answers. Good scholarship helps create other questions. Maybe you don't know all the answers, but you continue to search.

Being driven is useful in any position. Following up with a hiring official could make you more likely to be offered a job, and performing well in a job can mean promotions and raises. The alumni who spoke about being self-motivated tended to also say they were confident in their academic and career choices, and demonstrated resiliency if things did not work out.

Alumni also gained practical skills – especially those in the natural sciences who conducted research in a lab. A math student who used SPSS statistics during Summer Fellows said that it was also useful in her graduate school program:

I'm pretty sure that when I was a master's student... I got more opportunities that had to do with research because people thought I was good at research, because it was on my resume. They asked me to be a tutor in their Ph.D. statistics class. We used SPSS, but I didn't really know what I was doing... But it made me interested in technology in general, and now I work with an online program... I have to understand everything behind the math that we're doing. It laid a foundation for me to want to get better at different things.

Knowing how to use certain software is an added bonus to many résumés, because technology is widely used as an organizational tool in all types of workplaces. An advantage of working with computer programs during Summer Fellows is that students get one-on-one mentorship on what to do, which is useful when needing to follow exact steps to produce a certain result. Not only was

knowledge of software programs important to certain alumni, but methodology was also utilized outside of the classroom, as explained by this math major:

The way that we framed and approached that problem is still the way I do research today. It's how I approached what I did in graduate school, and how I'm approaching the problem I'm doing now.

The summer is a convenient opportunity to test out what works methodologically, because there is someone to guide the student, there is financial compensation for the student's time, and they are not graded on the final result. Students arrive back to campus with a firm methodological basis from which to work as they continue to conduct research and fine-tune their skills.

As a form of institutionalized cultural capital, having Summer Fellows listed on a résumé is also an advantage for students, because it is a fellowship position, which is competitive and prestigious in nature. It also suggests a strong work ethic, because students voluntarily spend eight additional weeks out of the year during their summer break to conduct academic research. Because Ursinus is a small liberal arts college, many people outside of the Philadelphia area have never heard of it before, which can present challenges when applying to jobs or graduate schools. However, an alumnus who majored in business and economics explained that having Summer Fellows on his résumé draws the attention of potential employers, because they are curious about what the fellowship entailed:

A conversation starter that is very unique on a resume... It is something that has come up in just about every interview that I've had over the years... The tangible portion of your question is very much related to having it on my resume, and having it stand out... maybe someone hadn't heard of Ursinus College before, but this peaked their curiosity.

However, an alumnus who majored in physics and math admitted that it does not serve as well for a job position versus a graduate degree:

It is the highlight of my resume, but it's not as big of a deal when you're applying for work, but it is a huge deal when you're applying to graduate school. In addition, the first thing that pops up when you google my name is my honors paper.

Because the research is academic in nature, it makes sense that it is more helpful to advertise the experience to graduate schools rather than a job position where standard research is not the focus. This also goes for publications. Some alumni mentioned that their summer work resulted in a publication, which is an excellent addition to a curriculum vitae. A CV, which emphasizes research and academic experience, is particularly useful when seeking a job in higher education or applying to a graduate program. Academia relies on scholarship, and the process of getting scholarly writing published is often arduous because it requires frequent editing and peer review. Therefore, each publication an individual can advertise on a CV makes them more competitive. It is especially difficult to have research from your undergraduate education published, but is more likely when working on faculty research. An alumna who majored in psychology was able to add another line to her CV:

I also feel like [faculty] asked a little group of us if we were interested in it, so it was just like an “oh sure.” I guess if an opportunity presented itself, that was great... She’s still using the work I did and other students did in publications. She just published a textbook in 2017. I added another publication to my CV.

Some alumni said that Summer Fellows was originally on their résumé, but after being out of school and in the workforce or a graduate program for a few years, it falls off. However, when the work results in a publication, it is a longer-lasting benefit. A tenure-track math professor explained how her Summer Fellows project resulted in a major publication, which benefits her to this day:

I did include it on my applications... I included it on my CV, and it did result in a peer-reviewed publication in a journal. If it was just a little research project, it would’ve fallen off by now...

Other than the program and the paper, the presentation is also useful on a résumé. Most alumni who mentioned presenting at the symposium, however, explained it as an experience that was personally beneficial. Students who present at the symposium speak for ten minutes about

what they accomplished over the summer, and then have a five-minute question-and-answer period. The Summer Fellows Symposium was my first time ever presenting academic work outside of class, and it was incredibly beneficial for me when I had to present the first half of my Honors research to my committee at the end of the fall semester. The communication skills that come from needing to present research were invaluable to some, as exemplified by this alumnus who majored in biology:

Even just the symposium... even getting the opportunity to stand – you don't know how many people will come. You don't know how many people it's gonna be. Making a speech to use in front of people has been very helpful to me in this job... I think any sort of practice you can get in public speaking is going to help you down the line.

The presentation is especially useful for those who pursue research positions or graduate studies, as stated by an alumnus who majored in physics: “And that gave us more confidence – it gave us more experience communicating our results.” Being confident in a skill is a benefit when it comes to using that skill in a different setting.

The program gave each person a special skill that they were lacking before, and it has made their experience worthwhile and worth sharing. A student currently pursuing a Ph.D. explained how completing Summer Fellows improved her graduate school experience by enabling her to become more analytical:

It taught me to see things with a critical eye... the sheer amount of background research that you're doing for Summer Fellows... it was judging things with that critical eye and not taking research as fact which has helped me immensely in graduate school... It's taught me about good work ethic and just... I don't know, being diligent and seeing things through. It made me a better student and made me a better clinician. I apply that to my therapy.

One alumna, who majored in international relations, had a lot to say about the program that she found to be advantageous:

Doing the Summer Fellows program showed me that I was interested in doing research... if I hadn't done Summer Fellows I would've thought I wasn't smart enough to do Honors

research. I also think the practice of doing... so we had to do a formal presentation at the end, and that was really helpful to me, because... it was a different kind of presentation, and to be... open to potential scrutiny. And in my work... I do research on our programs internally all the time. It opened up my area of professional work that I don't think I would have explored or been interested in otherwise.

The qualities, skills, and specialized knowledge that made them competent researchers also helped them in their jobs. Some of them continue to do research, both academic in nature in a graduate program or with a company as an analyst. This demonstrates that the cultural capital, both embodied and institutionalized, functions in the professional world, albeit in different capacities.

Scales of Benefit

Some of these benefits have a higher cultural capital value for students in certain disciplines, mainly in terms of publications and presentations. Students who work on faculty research are much more likely to have their names included on a publication, which is immensely appealing on a résumé or CV. Of the alumni who said their Summer Fellows work resulted in a publication, each one was a natural science student who was working on a professor's research. Students in humanities, social sciences, and arts often complete a creative project of their own construction, whereas natural science students normally continue research they work on with a professor during the academic year. Therefore, it is more likely that natural science students benefit more from the paper they write and the presentation, because their professor is more inclined to submit writing for publication or present at conferences.

The types of skills developed also vary among disciplines. Natural science students described how their physical skills improved by spending hours in the lab each day. Students in labs work with particular equipment to conduct experiments, and they are able to practice using them in a more intensive setting. Students in the social sciences, arts, and humanities would

generally discuss more abstract skills, such as social skills, time management, and project construction.

Although many skills are shared, they manifest in different ways. For example, time management varies among disciplines, because students in the natural sciences are often dependent on their experiments – sometimes they must wait for chemical reactions to happen, or for the axolotls to regrow their tails. For other students, often they must pace themselves in reading and writing, which requires a different degree of self-motivation and time management. Natural science students are also bound by pre-established protocol, whereas students outside of those fields construct creative, original projects, which therefore allows them greater freedom in intellectual exploration. They are solely responsible for developing their own project and following a timeline of their own construction.

In addition, it seems as though students outside the natural sciences benefitted from realizing that there are numerous options for work after graduating, and that majors do not have to be limiting in terms of career trajectory. Students in the natural sciences tended to have a better sense of what they wanted to do after graduating, and knew that research experience in this form would help them to achieve those particular goals.

Where the Program Falls Short

Naturally, the experience is not perfect. Some participants expressed points of discontent, usually regarding personal finances. One alumni, who majored in business and economics and now works for an investment firm, said he also completed an internship that summer at 25 hours per week and worked on a farm. He shared that, in spite of the stipend, financing his summer proved to be difficult:

Finances were... uh, an issue. Or not an issue. It was something I was concerned about. I wanted to make sure that the internship stipend – I’m sorry, the Summer Fellows stipend wasn’t going to be enough to get me through senior year...

The Summer Fellows stipend has not increased in the last few years, which means it still presents challenges for students who struggle paying tuition. One alumna who worked as a resident advisor during her program said that the income generated from that position justified participating.

One alumna also explained that her advisor was not around much during Summer Fellows due to severe illness, and she had to do a lot of extra work on her own. A current student explained that while she and her advisor can talk easily about research and readings, they do not connect on any deeper level than that. Given the way that the program is advertised, with the emphasis on working intimately with a faculty mentor, it is reasonable that students who do not see their advisors as much would be disappointed.

However, these points of discontent are still useful to the program. These alumni still perceive the program positively, in spite of these issues, and shared them in hopes that I, as a researcher, will have the leverage to share this information in a way that improves the program to benefit the College. Many alumni suggested new interview questions, asked me how I planned to share the results, or had suggestions to improve my outreach methodology. They were willing to acknowledge the challenges and shortcomings, but also understood that these difficulties helped them to grow and they were thankful for what the opportunity provided them.

Conclusion

In February 2017, this project began with a simple question: “Why don’t you do that? Study the Fellows themselves?” I could not have anticipated this paper to be the result of that first question. By completing these two rounds of data collection and analysis, I learned that research is more organic than I expected it to be. Initially, I had hoped to address accessibility, but could

not do so. This topic is left to be explored. However, the project that ultimately evolved has produced a wealth of information that has already benefitted the program.

I met with Kelly Sorensen multiple times throughout the semester to discuss what the College might benefit from, and what I was hearing from students as a student. For example, many students expressed that they were unaware taxes would be taken out of the stipend: to fix this, new students were notified about the taxes and how they can get the money back in the application to the program. We also were able to address the program's accessibility by working with administrative offices to find the number of underrepresented students who participated in the program. We found that there is a high level of participation of students with these identities.

This thesis is novel in that it assesses perceived benefit. Given the program's longevity and that it is celebrated as an Ursinus tradition, it was crucial to see how alumni reflect on the program and what they think they gained from it. The College can now say that the program has lasting impacts on certain students, and that the program is not just valuable in the context of a student's undergraduate education at Ursinus. This also means it would be worthwhile to continue to expand and improve the program, in hopes that the benefit for students would increase as well. For example, given the uncomfortable nature of the process, the coordinators have discussed sponsoring new weekly events which would bring students together to discuss their research in a formal setting more frequently. In spite of the additional time, energy, and monetary commitment this would require, it would help facilitate the research process and encourage students to work collaboratively to see their projects through.

In terms of the value of the benefits, the accumulation of social, cultural, and symbolic capital that occurs during the program is substantial in the professional world. Graduates are able to extrapolate the capital they accumulated and situate it in new settings. The alumni attribute

aspects of their personal growth, refined research skills, and the relationships they developed in a large way to the Summer Fellows program. Speaking with the alumni about this experience, which they found to be generally enjoyable, also reconnected them with the College and their Ursinus experience. Even being able to speak with me, as a current student, connected us on a level of loyalty and devotion to Ursinus and a desire to improve conditions for future students. The College can utilize the perspectives provided in this paper to advertise the program to prospective students and Fellows, in hopes that it will attract more students to the College. There is a twofold benefit to the College in this way: firstly, reconnecting alumni to the College by reminding them of a meaningful experience might make them more likely to stay connected and potentially donate to the College's Annual Fund. The Annual Fund supports programs like Summer Fellows in addition to scholarships and financial aid, general student programming, clubs and organizations, the library, and the Berman Museum of Art on campus. An increasing enrollment also means more available funds for the College to utilize. Secondly, by increasing the amount of available funding sources, the College will grow and alumni will continue to be highly qualified job candidates after graduation, and the College will subsequently gain more prestige.

Not only is this research beneficial to the school, it is also beneficial to the existing literature on the topic, because it utilizes a novel theoretical framework: that of capital and intellectual community building. Previous studies had similar target groups and talked about similar benefits, but did not talk about them in the context of capital accumulation, which aids in translating the skills from undergraduate research in particular to the greater professional world. Using the framework of capital ascribes value to the benefits, both direct and indirect, that a student earns by participating. This, therefore, provides a useful methodology to examine the benefit of

having such programs, given that they are often used by schools across the United States to attract prospective students.

This research is not exhaustive. There is more that can be said about this program and what it means for students and alumni. This study can speak to common experiences, but it cannot speak for hundreds of former Fellows, nor for the Fellows who have yet to participate. There is also room for further analysis of the data from this project, especially as not all of it was used in this paper.

Speaking with current students during the summer revealed trends in post-graduation goals for this particular group of students. The culture of Summer Fellows is inherently academic, and this raised the question of how Fellows leave Ursinus and join the professional world with skills, knowledge, and identities shaped by the program. Students come back to campus with high hopes and extraordinary expectations to live up to, and they often find ways to rise to the challenge, coming out of the program a better researcher, student, and worker. The social capital accumulated is long-lasting and enriching, and the cultural capital has translated value in various parts of the working world. For the students who participate in the program, it is an experience of undeniable importance and is perceived as greatly beneficial to them.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. Notably, selection bias is prevalent – I spoke with people who perceived the program positively. The program worked well for these people, which is why they were willing to speak about it so enthusiastically. For some former students, it is likely that the experience was not as beneficial for them, and they were therefore not inclined to participate and share their stories. While some students expressed some things about the program that they did not like, they generally had a positive experience. I attempted to offset this bias by discussing how the experience is beneficial and by not making any claims that it is the

reason why alumni are successful. In addition, I noted certain places where alumni expressed that the program or their experience fell short.

There is also bias on my part, as the writer and researcher. I participated in Summer Fellows myself, and found it to be an immensely beneficial and transformational experience. It affirmed my desire to pursue graduate studies, and I believe that having that experience strengthened my curriculum vitae. I am, therefore, inclined to view the program as a generally positive experience and connect more with alumni who share this sentiment.

A third limitation is that students from the years 1996 through 1999 were not reached. This presents a significant issue considering that the voices from the program's pilot year are not included. The program grew exponentially from its inaugural year – from just ten to a now maximum of 80 students.

The timing of this project also presented difficulties. Having over 44 pages of data and only a few months to code and analyze it meant that the coding process was brief and less thorough than it could have been had there been more time. Another methodological limitation is that alumni interviews were not recorded, and all I have are typed notes.

Lastly, a week after the surveys were sent, Kelly Sorensen explained that the survey to the three large class years did not go through, which is why there were no respondents – in addition, the response rate for former Fellows was very low. The data I have from most current students is from peers who I have a relationship with outside of this project, which makes them more inclined to participate. Because these are people I am acquainted with, we share similar interests and likely have similar perspectives on our experiences in the program. Yet despite these limitations, I am confident in my main finding, which is that the Summer Fellows program is a valuable experience for Ursinus students entering the professional world.

Appendix

Survey Questions

Current Student, Former Fellow

1. Class Year
2. What year did you participate in Summer Fellows?
 - a. 2016
 - b. 2017
3. Major(s)
4. Minor(s)
5. What discipline was your project in?
6. Briefly describe the timeline of your project. For example: “I drafted a timeline, spent the first three weeks reading scholarly literature, drafted an outline for my paper during week four...”
7. How often did you meet with your advisor?
8. Had you conducted research prior to Summer Fellows?
9. Did you continue/expand on your research into the school year?
 - a. Did you start a new project?
10. Do you feel as though you could have done something differently? If so, what?
11. What are you thinking about doing after you graduate? Are you applying for any fellowships? (Fulbright, Watson, etc.)

→ Elaborate during interview
12. Would you be interested in interviewing?
 - a. **Interview Questions**
 - i. Further discussing the experience
 - ii. What were your meetings with your advisor like?
 1. How long did they last?
 - iii. What research are you currently working on?
 - iv. What skills did you gain?
 - v. Did the program meet your expectations? Did you have the experience you expected to have?

Alumni

1. What year did you graduate?
2. What was your major?
3. What year did you participate in Summer Fellows?
4. What do you see as being the greatest benefit to your participation?
5. What did you do immediately after graduating?
6. What are you doing now, professionally?
7. Would you like to participate in an interview?

All students (Class years 2019, 2020, 2021)

1. What did you do last summer? (Work, intern, volunteer, etc)
2. Are you thinking about participating in Summer Fellows?
 - a. Yes, yes (but not this year), no
 - b. Why or why not?

- c. If yes, do you have a project in mind?
 - d. If not, what do you plan to do during the summer?
 - i. Paid/unpaid internship, work, other research opportunity, family obligations
3. For 2019 and 2020, do you intend to apply this year?

Interview Questions

Current Student, Former Fellow

1. Further discussing the experience
2. What were your meetings with your advisor like?
3. How long did they last?
4. What research are you currently working on?
5. What skills did you gain?
6. Did the program meet your expectations? Did you have the experience you expected to have?

Alumni

1. Further asking about academic experience (other memorable coursework or professors)
2. Can you describe the path you took to get where you are today? Did you have any significant moments of clarity during your undergraduate education about what you wanted your future to look like?
3. Did Summer Fellows benefit you in a direct way, such as using the experience on a resume/CV or asking your advisor for a letter of recommendation?
4. Did Summer Fellows benefit you in an indirect way, such as using skills or knowledge you gained in a new position?

References

- Bauer, Karen W. and Joan S. Bennett. 2003. "Alumni Perceptions Used to Assess Undergraduate Research Experience." *The Journal of Higher Education* 74(2):210-230.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 2016. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 184-197 in *Social Theory Rewired* Edited by W. Longhofer and D. Winchester. New York: Routledge.
- Craney, Chris, Tara McKay, April Mazzeo, Janet Morris, Cheryl Prigodich, and Robert de Groot. 2011. "Cross-Discipline Perception of the Undergraduate Research Experience." *The Journal of Higher Education* 82(1): 92-113.
- Eagan, K., Stolzenberg, E. B., Ramirez, J. J., Aragon, M. C., Suchard, M. R., & Hurtado, S. 2014. "The American freshman: National norms fall 2014." Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA.
- Hancock, Mary P., James McCullough and Susan H. Russel. 2007. "Benefits of Undergraduate Research Experiences." *Science* 316(5824):548-549.
- Mead, George Herbert. 2016. "Self." Pp. 453-468 in *Social Theory Re-Wired*, edited by Wesley Longhofer and Daniel Winchester. New York: Routledge.
- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2016. "Digest of Education Statistics, 2015." Retrieved April 10, 2018 (<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>).