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Recommended Citation

Shafeeq, Hira () "Demystifying Research for Undergraduate Students: An Avenue to Participate in Mission-based Research," *Journal of Vincentian Social Action*: Vol. 7: Iss. 2, Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jovsa/vol7/iss2/4>

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DEMISTIFYING RESEARCH FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS: AN AVENUE TO PARTICIPATE IN MISSION-BASED RESEARCH

Hira Shafeeq

We are beyond pleased to have assembled the fourth Student/Faculty Research issue of the Journal of Vincentian Social Action (JoVSA). The Ozanam Scholars program, a program of the Vincentian Institute for Social Action (VISA), is committed to supporting scholars that critically examine systems that perpetuate the cycle of poverty through service and research. The five pillars of poverty, scholars are encouraged to center in their research include: homelessness, hunger, healthcare, environmental and socioeconomic justice. This special issue highlights some of the collaborative research efforts from faculty mentors and student scholars over the span of the last two years of their University experience. Everyone, including the broader University community, are the beneficiaries of these works, each providing a view into common challenges across society.

The Ozanam Scholars are carefully selected from high school through an application process. During their Freshman and Sophomore year, scholars focus on learning about research methods, service and completing the requirements of their social justice minor. The Junior and Senior year of their undergraduate college experience is focused on completing a capstone research project. The project is rooted in the principles of social justice and best practices for community-based research. The first portion of the research involves completing community-based surveys or structured interviews to gain an understanding of the problem and how the community envisions solving the issue. The second portion of the project is focused on offering a possible solution and gaining community feedback.

This is an arduous task for any undergraduate to take on. Our scholars continually impress

us with their efforts and unique approach to solving social justice inequities in an array of communities, locally and globally. The greatest support our scholars receive is through a faculty mentor. Faculty mentors are critical in seeing these projects through to fruition. Most of the work for the faculty mentor is in the initial phases, or during the junior year, for the scholar's project. The mentors assist in narrowing the scope of the problem and ironing out a concrete research question. VISA has staff dedicated to making this process simpler for the student and the mentor. Demystifying research for undergraduates involves motivating students to conduct research by answering why it is an essential part of their scholarship experience. Explicitly offering answers for why it is important to research a solution to a poverty-based issue and sharing the results with the broader community. Why is it important to complete an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application? How does research move society forward just as much as service? Answers to these questions are provided during sophomore and junior research workshops, so students can better grasp the importance of research. Another important tool utilized to demystify research is breaking down the research process into smaller steps: identifying the research question, problem and community, the IRB process and the final step of conducting community-based research. Adding a timeline and deadlines for these deliverables can be helpful in keeping students accountable for the pace of the project.

I've had the pleasure of bearing witness to the development of strong faculty-student mentor relationships over the years through research. The Ozanam Scholars program is indebted to the dedication of faculty mentors and the time they

additional mentors and would like to encourage new faculty to apply for serving as a mentor. This is an excellent way to get involved in mission-based research during a student's early years at the University. The program has a research advisor and graduate research assistant to support scholars and faculty mentors through the process.

I commend our scholars and faculty mentors for sharing their research with the larger University Community. One of the remarkable benefits of publishing in JoVSA are the opportunities to see the many focused research initiatives that are undertaken. I am very pleased to highlight these articles. Each is an example of what can happen when students and faculty work together to address an issue and bring about change.

Please let us know what you think:
jovsa@stjohns.edu

If you're interested in serving as a faculty mentor for The Ozanam Scholars Program, please email Dr. Seegel: seegela@stjohns.edu

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Dr. Shafeeq is an Associate Professor in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences at St. John's University, Queens, NY. She also serves as the Faculty Research Advisor for the University's Ozanam Scholars Program. This program provides a platform for students to critically examine the systems that perpetuate poverty and take action to advance social justice through academic scholarship, service, and global citizenship. She maintains a clinical practice site at the Trauma ICU at Nassau University Medical Center, which is a level I safety net hospital located in East Meadow, NY. She serves as a restorative justice facilitator for the University's RESPECT (Respond and Partner to Engage our Community Team) bias response team. She is the Faculty Chair and co-coordinator for the College's Changing Faces of Pharmacy Program.