

At Fresno State, research a key to growth

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Each year, Fresno State funnels around \$37 million to faculty and student research projects. Many promising careers have begun at Fresno State with the inspiration students receive helping faculty members with their research projects.

Each year, organizations like the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Health put up millions of dollars to fund collegiate research that involves the participation of both graduate and undergraduate students.

While certainly not getting the largest share in the country, about \$37 million comes to Fresno State each year to support faculty and student research.

The money is distributed through the university's Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, which helps faculty members find grants and other funding sources and submits applications on their behalf.

Dr. Ellen Shimikawa, director of the office, said every effort is made to find grants that are geared toward student involvement.

"We're very entrepreneurial here," said Shimikawa, who was appointed director last April. "Our faculty go after contracts where there will be opportunities for their students to train. We go after centers of excellence grants where there's sort of a mixture of training and research."

Often, information about grant opportunities and can be learned through workshops the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs puts on throughout the year.

A few monetary awards are given by Fresno State itself, including the Claude C. Laval Jr. Award for Innovative Technology & Research and the CSU Awards for Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity.

The office also assists faculty with patent services, preparing budgets, meeting deadlines and contractual obligations and ensuring that proper protocols are followed when research projects involve human subjects or biological specimens.

Perhaps its most important function is coordinating the annual Central California Research Symposium that brings together hundreds of students and faculty members to the University Business Center in April to present some of their work and findings and also to network with fellow researchers at Fresno State and other schools.

“We do partner with UCSF as well as Alliant University and UC Merced, encouraging (Fresno State students) to apply to those schools when they graduate,” Shimikawa said.

Around ten of those same presenters are also selected by the office as delegates for the CSU Student Research Competition in May when students will share their research before a panel of judges for a shot at a first place award in various academic disciplines.

A survey by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs in the latest academic year revealed that of Fresno State’s more than 500 full-time, tenured track faculty, just fewer than 200 responded, saying they conduct research involving students.

Though without the name recognition and published studies of heavily funded schools like UCLA, UC San Francisco and Columbia, Shimikawa said Fresno State has always looked at research as more about the educational experience, with greater participation among students and interest from an array of academic disciplines.

“Psychology, biology, chemistry. We’re very active,” she said. “We have representation from every single college and I would venture to say almost every single department.”

Timothy Yeager, executive director of the Behavioral Health Sciences Institute at Fresno State, began his current career path conducting research projects in the Department of Psychology before going on to Columbia University in 2010 for his master’s degree.

Specifically, Yeager, and fellow group of students were looking at a tutoring curriculum known as Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) for children with learning disabilities. Building on previous research that had found the program effective for classrooms of students in the same grade level, the team implemented the curriculum successfully in a classroom with multiple age groups represented.

“It helped me in a lot of ways because I left here and went into a program training teachers who were going through teachers college at Columbia University,” said Yeager, who is now in his last semester studying for his Ph.D at Columbia University.

After working in Dr. Santanu Maitra’s organic chemistry lab a few years ago, senior biology major Pooja Patel learned skill sets that turned around his struggles in school and gave him the confidence to participate in an international research internship and apply to graduate schools to study public health.

Patel said he knew little about chemistry or research when he first joined but quickly learned from graduate students and professors in the lab about experimentation techniques, collecting data and many other methods he can now apply in any field.

“Research is a form of training,” Patel said. “The professors who mentor you know so many professionals in their field that you will be surprised at the opportunities that fall into your lap once you start researching.”

