

PRESIDENTIAL WHITE PAPER

The Power of Student Research



THE CAMPAIGN FOR
CLAREMONT MCKENNA

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The Power of Student Research

Through myriad opportunities inside and outside the classroom, Claremont McKenna students develop sophisticated research skills that have an impact on their careers and success in graduate school.

Each year at Claremont McKenna College, a group of committed students takes on the challenging assignment of analyzing corporate reports on environmental sustainability. The students, who work with faculty advisors at the College's [Roberts Environmental Center](#), use the Pacific Sustainability Index to study the voluntary information supplied by some of the world's largest corporations. After poring over the data, the students publish their analysis on a CMC website that grades companies in terms of the transparency of their environmental reporting.

This endeavor is not an obscure academic exercise. Prominent national and international companies take the results seriously and go to the Roberts Center website to learn how they can improve their sustainability reporting practices.

While Roberts Center students are pushing corporations to become better environmental citizens, students at CMC's [Rose Institute of State and Local Government](#) are working with cities, counties, and government agencies on issues ranging from political redistricting to the implications of increasing the sales tax. Rose Institute undergraduates are paid consultants, and many of them are recruited during their freshman year and stay with the "firm" throughout their college experience. By the time they are juniors and seniors, Rose Institute students are

presenting their findings to city managers and mayors, providing them with solutions to the complex task of governing.

The work at the Roberts Center and the Rose Institute are superb examples of a comprehensive effort at CMC to engage students in the research process. By the time our students graduate, every one of them has completed a substantial research project that goes well beyond the traditional classroom experience. The intentional focus on research skills prepares CMC students for careers and graduate school; equally important, it gives them the confidence to lead when they leave the College.

CMC is exemplary among national liberal arts colleges in the myriad choices it offers undergraduates to combine the intimate experience of a residential college with world-class research programs. CMC faculty represent the best of the teacher-scholar model, and they believe that their research must invariably involve students. One of the clear advantages of small classes and close student-faculty relationships is that our faculty encourage students to get involved in academic experiences outside the traditional classroom and they are more than willing to serve as mentors for student research projects.

Additionally, CMC's 10 research institutes engage about 50 percent of our students in undergraduate research. The [Keck Center for International and Strategic Studies](#) funds students for international research projects that have taken them to Asia to understand emerging economic issues. The [Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Human Rights](#) sponsors students to travel around the world to examine human rights issues—from Africa to Eastern Europe to Latin America. The [Kravis Leadership Institute](#) offers a broad range of summer internships that take students from Washington, D.C., to participate in discussions on

the role of government to the Middle East to research the implications of rural poverty. The list goes on.

In conjunction with the work of our research institutes, faculty across academic departments at the College are committed to working with students on research skills and methodology. Our math department, for example, regularly has students who go to national conferences to present their research findings and interact with scholars throughout the world. Similarly, many laboratories in the psychology department function as mini-research institutes. In the lab of Professor Daniel Krauss, students are researching the intersections between law and psychology as they investigate how jurors react to and weight psychological expert testimony in specific types of trials. Six CMC students in the lab have been co-authors of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. Others have presented aspects of their research at national conferences, including the American Psychological Association Conference, the American Psychology and Law Conference, and the Western Psychological Association Conference.

CMC students must also complete a senior thesis that is tied to their major and allows them to pursue their interests and passions. The senior thesis has been part of the fabric of the College since its founding, and through the years students have taken advantage of this opportunity to work on a range of fascinating and challenging projects. Government and economics majors develop weighty, 100-pages analyses of the most pressing topics of the day. By contrast, a CMC student in the 1980s wanted to build an electric car from scratch for his thesis—he was well ahead of the current green technology movement. In order to prove he was successful, he had to take his advisor on a 12-mile drive, without breaking down, when it was completed.

Why does CMC put such a strong emphasis on undergraduate research? The competitive global economy places a premium on analytical skills, problem solving, communication, teamwork, and responsible leadership. CMC's mission is fundamentally linked to these qualities, and undergraduate research enhances these skills in powerful ways. Research opportunities bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical for our students.

From a pragmatic perspective, CMC alumni have clearly benefited from their research training. In 2005, the College surveyed current students and graduates about the impact of their research experiences. Overwhelmingly, students and alumni reported that their experiences helped to prepare them for the job market and graduate school. Indeed, we have heard from many alumni in graduate school who reported that they were well ahead of their peers in terms of research skills.

The Campaign for Claremont McKenna will bolster undergraduate research opportunities on a broad range of fronts. The campaign will support the College's research institutes, providing new possibilities that will engage faculty and students on pressing economic, political, environmental, and social issues. Through the student leadership fund, CMC will create additional internships that enable our students to pursue research interests that take them from the rain forests of the Amazon to the headquarters of the United Nations. Support for the faculty development fund will provide young faculty members with research support to develop innovative new projects, and invariably our faculty involve students in their research endeavors.

CMC has created an environment that is conducive to student research and truly distinctive in higher education. The possibilities for our students are varied and exciting, and we look forward to fostering the development of new research opportunities for our students as the Campaign for Claremont McKenna progresses.