The impact of unplanned remote instruction on a CURE paired with cookbook-style laboratory exercises
Erika L. Doctor, PhD, Melissa Lehman, PhD, and Cassandra S. Korte, PhD
College of Arts and Sciences, Lynn University, Boca Raton, FL
Contact: edoctor@lynn.edu, mlehman@lynn.edu, ckorte@lynn.edu

INTRODUCTION

Course based-undergraduate research experiences (CUREs) have been well defined in the literature. These authentic research experiences can be designed in many different ways, ranging from fully faculty-guided to completely student-driven (Spell et al., 2014). The implementation of CUREs is growing within biology education because they have been shown to provide collaborative environments that foster engagement with the scientific process, while promoting iterative research through the process of discovery (Auchincloss et al., 2014). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the semester-long CURE developed by our group experienced a rapid transition to remote instruction, creating a pseudo-experimental condition to compare student performance across semesters in on-campus versus remote learning conditions. In this semester-long set of laboratory modules, students develop skills to assess exposure to environmental chemicals. As originally designed, students participate in hands-on cookbook-style labs to learn about sample extraction methods and are introduced to the CURE-project, which entails authentic sample extraction, data analysis, and presentation of a poster. Rather than completing the full set of modules, the COVID-19 cohort completed the canned labs, but were tasked with virtually viewing the experimental process and analyzing previously collected data. Previous work by Kirkpatrick et al. (2019), has determined that there was no significant difference in the positive impacts on students’ attitudes between students who completed a computer-based CURE versus a bench-based CURE. This study examines if that holds true when the same research project is taken to a remote format.

METHODS

Participants (2019, n=29; 2020, n=39) were recruited into the study at the beginning of the term. After providing informed consent (IRB #18.34), students completed a pre-course questionnaire to assess baseline scientific self-efficacy and scientific identity using the persistence in the sciences survey (PITS; Hanauer et al., 2016) and a pretest consisting of short answer questions relating to the chemistry of chemical extractions and detections. Students then completed the course as designed or with transition to remote learning (see right). An identical midterm was performed after the initial sequence of cookbook labs. After completion of the CURE component, students again completed the PITS survey and the identical posttest.

RESULTS

Exam spread for pre, mid, and posttests across both academic terms (2019, n=27; 2020, n=37). Exam scores significantly improved through the duration of each term, F (2, 124) = 138.92, p < 0.001. However, there were no significant differences in exam scores between years, F(2, 124) = 0.425, p = 0.655.

Comparison of pre-course surveys across both academic years. No significant differences were observed across the two terms, indicating each student population was similar to each other. Post-course survey scores were not compared because of low completion rate in 2020 (n=9).

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we found that students:

- Still reported enjoying the CURE.
- Recognized the real-world applications of the CURE Requested to continue with the project.

CURE implementation is growing as literature supports their efficacy in student learning when paired with a research project, even if the research project is not hands-on. Because cookbook labs may be both cheaper and easier to prepare, the bar for implementation of CUREs in undergraduate science courses may be lowered.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research is supported by the Roberta Williams Laboratory Teaching Initiative Grant awarded by the Association for Biology Laboratory Education, 2018. We gratefully acknowledge Tara Lumsford and Joshua Noriega as undergraduate research assistants on this project.

REFERENCES

Hanauer et al., 2016. CBE-Life Sciences Education, 15(34), 1-10.
Spell et al., 2014. CBE-Life Sciences Education, 13, 102-110.