

Engineering Professor Creates Undergraduate Research Program to Support Transfer Students | College of Engineering

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News Release — January 12, 2022 — As part of a research fellowship from Utah State University's Center for Intersectional Gender Studies and Research, associate professor of biological engineering Elizabeth Vargis is developing a program to provide support to transfer students through undergraduate research opportunities.



Associate professor of biological engineering Elizabeth Vargis was awarded a research fellowship from Utah State University's Center for Intersectional Gender Studies and Research which she will use to develop a program to provide support to transfer students through undergraduate research opportunities. (Matt Jensen/USU)

"For me personally, the greatest experience I had as an undergraduate was doing undergraduate research," Vargis said. "I wanted to look at a population that may not be taken care of enough and then I wanted to pair it with what I personally have gained the most from and what I currently try to provide students with."

Vargis's goal is to create a program where engineering transfer students could receive a stipend for participating in mentored research and additional opportunities like undergraduate research events and the student research symposium. Her hope is this program would not only provide these students with hands-on experiences but also create a built-in community for them.

As an undergraduate, Vargis said lab work created an important opportunity for her to connect and create deep friendships with a group of otherwise very different students.

"My mentors from that lab still write me recommendation letters," she said.

Increasing diversity in the student population is one of the goals of the research fellowships from the Center for Intersectional Gender Studies and Research. Vargis said while many engineering transfer students at USU fit the college's largest student demographic of white males, transfer students may be diverse in other ways.

She also said as the program is developed, it could be used as a tool to recruit transfer students and help increase the diversity of engineering students. Vargis says she'd like to create a summer research experience for community college students to come live in Logan and work with USU professors as a way for them to decide if the university is a good fit for them.

Vargis said many universities across the United States have programs with similar goals and she plans on drawing from some of these existing models as she creates a program at Utah State. Her next steps will include recruiting other interested faculty to serve as mentors and using this award as a pilot project to secure additional funding from other sources.

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