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Project Abstract (150 words)

The Studio Lab for Undergraduate Research in the College of Arts & Sciences solicits applications from mentors (tenure track faculty, instructors, teaching faculty, and Ph.D. students nominated by their advisors) and from undergraduate students. We pair undergraduates with mentor-led projects and pay students to work with their mentor for about 5 hours a week during the semester. We are applying for funds to conduct a program evaluation based on a randomized experiment in which we can track the progress of students who are admitted to Studio Lab and those who apply but are not admitted to Studio Lab. This will provide unique insight into whether and how programs like Studio Lab are advancing their goals in the areas of justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion, skill acquisition, retention, graduation rates, and even job placement.

Project Summary

Along with my collaborator (Abigail Dym, University of Pennsylvania), I am requesting funds for the first year of what we hope will be a multi-year program evaluation of how the newly formed Studio Lab for Undergraduate Research influences students' academic performance, retention in college, graduation rates, applications for outside internships, and ultimately securing employment after college. Studio Lab is an innovative way to promote experiential learning by facilitating connections between undergraduate students and mentors (tenure-track faculty, instructors, full-time researchers, and occasionally Ph.D. candidates) at the University of Colorado Boulder. This is truly a new kind of program for a large research university. Preliminary observations about the lab have been published in [*PS: Politics and Society*](#) and the Studio Lab model is being emulated at Drexel University.

Studio Lab began in the Department of Political Science, expanded to the division of social sciences, and for the first time in the 2023-2024 academic year is operating at the level of the College of Arts & Sciences. Studio Lab asks undergraduate students to apply by indicating why they want to participate and what their interests are. We prioritize admitting a diverse group of students who are in their first 2 years of undergraduate education although undergraduates at all stages are welcome to apply. Potential mentors apply separately proposing a project on which students can work. We admit students and projects, pair students with mentor-led projects, and pay students to work with their mentors. Studio Lab also holds professionalization and social events, and a big end of year poster extravaganza at which students and mentors highlight their work in Studio Lab.

I am working with Abigail Dym, a Ph.D. candidate the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, to use a randomized experiment to evaluate the effectiveness of the Studio Lab program. We propose to track 200 students who apply in April 2024 for 4 years. We will have a committee rank applicants. Students' applications will be ranked "1" (definitely admit), "2" (maybe admit), and "3" (do not admit). We will average the committee member rankings for each student. Of those students who receive an average score less than a set cut-off (likely 2.5), we will randomize their admission into the program. We are aiming to get at least 200

applicants in spring 2024. Past rounds of applications have results in more than 100 applicants. With additional publicizing, we are optimistic that we can get up to 200 applicants. The randomized admissions will allow us to track the students who were admitted and the students who were not admitted for at least 5 years. The 5-year time frame will allow us to assess whether students were more or less likely to graduate and get jobs.

With this application, we are asking for funds to cover 2 things: 1) participant costs in the first year of our program evaluation, and 2) a portion of the costs of Studio Lab's operations for the next year which will enable us to admit more students than we typically would.

First, we are asking for funds to cover participants costs in our research meaning the cost of paying students \$50 annually to complete the end of year survey at the end of the 2024 academic year. In the long run, we hope to survey up to 100 admitted students and 100 non-admitted students each year for 5 years. We are only asking for funds for the first-year of compensation which amounts to \$10,000 (\$50 each for 200 students). We will seek out other grant money to fund years 2 through 4 of this research. Although this amount may seem high, it is important to remember that students are frequently asked to complete surveys, response rates are often low, and it is critical that we get non-admitted students to regularly respond for the research design of this program evaluation to be effective. Research has shown raffles for larger prizes in return for answering surveys are largely not effective. Response rates are better when potential respondents are often definite (and significant) amounts for completing a survey.

Second, our annual budget has allowed us to admit about 50 undergraduate students each academic year. We are requesting an additional \$29,286 to allow us to admit up to 12 more students. Each undergraduate student receives 75 hours of paid work each semester for a total of 150 paid hours of work for the academic year. We pay \$16.27 hours including the fringe benefits rate of 1.7%. This means that each student in Studio Lab costs \$2,440.50 for the entire academic year. An additional \$29,286 will allow us to accept at least 12 more students. Because students sometimes use work study awards with Studio Lab, this money may go farther than just admitting 12 additional students. Admitting additional students will be vital for boosting the validity of our research with more observations.

We are only asking for funds to be used during the 2024-2025 academic year. During the 2024-2024 academic year, we will be applying for outside sources of funding to continue both Studio Lab's operations and our program evaluation research. Funds in this first year are critical to demonstrate to outside funders that this innovative experiential learning program and the randomized experiment are feasible.

This research would accomplish several of the goals for the Dean's Innovation Fund resources. In particular, this is good for: 1) advancing justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion goals that seek to improve student, staff, and faculty access to and/or retention in the college, 2) improving first-year student retention to second year, 3) spawning cross-disciplinary research projects.

Advancing Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Studio Lab seeks prioritizes justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in its admissions of both mentors and undergraduate students. Our goal is to admit a diverse range of projects across the College of Arts & Sciences, and a diverse group of undergraduate students. We facilitate meaningful connections between faculty, researchers, and students and often through project teams with 2 or more students working with a mentor (or sometimes with multiple mentors). Certain students, including first generation college students and historically underrepresented groups, are much less likely to make these connections on their own.

Improving first-year student retention to second year. We strongly suspect that programs like Studio Lab can help provide pathways for first-year students to connect with faculty, and provide a way for first-year students to make concrete plans about working with faculty in their second year. We further think that this is likely to boost graduation rates for certain groups of students like first-generation college students and historically underrepresented groups.

Spawning new cross-disciplinary research projects. Studio Lab accepts project proposals from mentors across all of the units in the College of Arts & Sciences and the Institute of Behavioral Science. We accept applications from any undergraduate student at the University of Colorado Boulder. In keeping with the spirit of “and-ing”, a term used by Dean Erika Randall, we can encourage and facilitate students in working on projects outside their main area of study by assigning them to projects that may not be their major field or even their minor field. In short, there is a great potential for students to get cross-disciplinary and sometimes interdisciplinary research experience.

Project Budget

Our proposed budget is below.

Item	Amount	Brief Explanation
Compensation of 200 participants at the end of the first year of the program evaluation	\$10,000	We propose to pay \$50 per student to fill out our end-of-year questionnaire. Half of these participants would be students who were <u>not</u> admitted to Studio Lab. Because students are frequently surveyed, response rates are typically low, and we must get responses from students who were <u>not</u> admitted for our program evaluation to be meaningful, it is vital that we offer a guarantee of significant compensation to ensure a good response rate.
Portion of costs of Studio Lab’s operations; specifically funds to admits up to 12 additional undergraduate students	\$29,286	We pay \$16/hour plus a 1.7% fringe rate for a total cost of \$16.27/hour. For 12 students with awards of 75 hours of paid work for 2 semesters (150 hours of work total), that equals \$29,286.00