‘Advance’ to boost research opportunities across all majors

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette's Student Government Association is spreading the word about the school's new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), Advance Student Research Experience to prepare for the university's upcoming reaccreditation visit, which will take place from Monday, Feb. 10 through Thursday, Feb. 13.

"So SGA, right now is kind of on the student side promoting it and making sure everyone's aware of the Quality Enhancement Plan," SGA Treasurer Jonathan Adams said. "I've helped out with the promotional plan of the Advance Student Research Experience."

Advance is designed to give undergraduate students more research opportunities. According to the Advance website, it will also provide opportunities for students to present their research by setting up a UL Undergraduate Research Conference, providing students with travel grants to present at regional and national conferences, starting an Advance Student Research Week to celebrate student research, publishing a journal about student research findings and displaying the products of student research in the UL Lafayette Institutional Repository.

Student research was actually SGA's second choice for the QEP, with the first being second-year retention, Adams said.

"Nonetheless, they went over throughout the whole campus and everyone voted," he said. "The Faculty Senate voted, and so forth, and they ended up choosing Advance Student Research as the Quality Enhancement Plan to kind of enhance the research aspect on campus and maybe promote us to being a tier-one research institution."

Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs Blanca Bauer, Ph.D., said UL Lafayette was lacking in terms of student research.

"Our students don't have the opportunities that other institutions or other students do to engage in these kinds of (research) opportunities," Bauer said.

The official QEP report reflects this. Only 8.3% students interviewed in the 2017-2018 Undergraduate Senior Exit Survey claimed to have done any work with a faculty member on a research project. The College Business Administration had the lowest amount of participation of the colleges interviewed, with only 3.9% of the students in the survey claiming to have participated in a research project with a faculty member.

While student research wasn't SGA's first choice, Adams said this is fine, as UL Lafayette is still going to be working on second-year retention despite it not being the focus of the university's new QEP.

"From what I was told, they're still going to be working on second-year retention," he said. "So they're still going to be focusing on the ideas from second-year retention, but it's not going to be an actual QEP as of now."

Adams wants students to understand that student research goes beyond what students typically imagine when they hear the term.

"I think that students should know that research isn't just STEM-based. It can be performing in a play, it can be doing research on heritage, on culture," he said. "They're available for every major at UL, and they're not meant to limit the students, but to encourage them that whatever they want to research, really whatever, is all up to them."