

Undergraduate Research in ALEC

Consumer-Focused Research

The intricacies of understanding an increasingly complex consumer decision-making process requires communicators to develop new methods of measuring consumer attitudes, brand and product performance, information available to consumers, and a holistic approach to evaluating the effectiveness of messages throughout the process. Developing new methods and metrics will only be successful if the center partners with individuals, organizations, and companies engaged in the development, production, and/or promotion of agriculture, food, and natural resources. Further, partnerships must be mutually beneficial for the center, its partners, and students.

Partnerships with Industry

In collaboration with industry partners, including Rodeo Austin, Country Music Association (CMA), and Cox Media Group, students address real-world problems. Students are responsible for planning their data collection strategy, implementing data collection, analyzing their data, developing project reports, and writing research manuscripts. Additionally, these projects lead to undergraduate theses, undergraduate and graduate student authorship of peer-reviewed publications with faculty, and technical reports that inform industry partners' decisions.

Integrating Undergraduate Research with Study Away (Field Research)

Collaborating with ALEC's Digital Media Research and Development Laboratory and Texas A&M System agencies (Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Extension), students have conducted data field data collection activities that contribute to multistate research conducted by USDA - NIFA's WERA 1010 (*Reduction of Error in Rural and Agricultural Surveys*). A 35-day field experience in four Western states (California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada), advances students' understanding of key concepts related to research methods and information literacy by applying them in a real-world setting.

ALEC Summer Study Away to California projects have included interviewing traditional and organic livestock and fresh-produce producers regarding the general public's food consumption and buying habits, and how consumer demand influences their operations. Also, students interview individuals from the general public regarding food consumption, buying habits, and opinions about agriculture. Additionally, students have documented store layouts and products grocery stores to investigate the relationship between products offered in impulse buying areas and consumer purchases of unhealthy food. Data collected by students during the ALEC Summer Study Away to California is used for Undergraduate Research Scholars projects and peer-reviewed journal publications written by undergraduate students.