

From the Editor

This is the third issue of *Chrestomathy*, the College of Charleston's journal for undergraduate research in the humanities and social sciences. As we did last year, the editorial board solicited nominations for the best paper written in each discipline during the 2003-2004 academic year; these papers were guaranteed publication. Departments and interdisciplinary programs were also invited to submit additional papers for consideration by the editor. This year we received ten departmental and ten additional nominations; of these latter ten, four were eventually selected for publication.

Once again I owe a great deal of thanks to Dean Sam Hines for his continuing and enthusiastic support of the journal, to the members of the editorial board for their work in identifying worthy papers, to Rpgger Brownlee and the Citadel print shop for their work in preparing the journal for publication, and most importantly to the student authors for all their hard work in writing and then revising their papers, often well after school had ended.

I have been asked why the journal uses the subtitle, "Journal for Undergraduate Research at the College of Charleston." Does this title not suggest that the journal is open to work in any discipline, even though the journal in fact publishes papers only in the humanities and the social sciences?

In fact work from other disciplines is not necessarily excluded. It was Dean Hines' original hope that the others schools at the College would participate, financially and editorially, in the operation of the journal. That this has not happened may ultimately be about differing models of what undergraduate research is, and I wanted to say something about those models here.

It is simply not possible for even the best undergraduates to write and publish papers in academic journals entirely on their own. Doing that requires a broader acquaintance with the methods and especially the ongoing conversation of a scholarly discipline, and that is what graduate school is for. In teaching undergraduates, we faculty try to

identify and encourage the students with the ability and commitment necessary to do scholarly work, but it is too much to ask those students already to know what people in the discipline have said and are saying, and without that, it is nearly impossible to offer a contribution to the conversation of the discipline, which is what a scholarly publication is. How, then, can we encourage our best undergraduates to take the first steps toward academic research? There seem to be two possible answers.

In the natural sciences, research is often if not generally collaborative, and it tends to involve a hierarchy of research tasks, from the design of an experiment to the collection of and analysis of the data. In such work there is often a subordinate but still essential role for less experienced researchers, and so it is possible for outstanding undergraduates to contribute to work of more senior researchers that will eventually be published in academic journals.

In the social sciences and especially in the humanities, this is simply not possible. In these fields, scholarly work has a certain solitude built into it, since such work is ultimately about reading and writing. And so we ask our undergraduates to read and write for themselves, and the best of them do it very well, but that work is not ready for scholarly publication, for the reasons I have already explained. A journal like this one is a way of honoring the work these outstanding students do, without pretending that the work is ready to be published in academic journals.

There are thus two kinds of undergraduate research. The first is collaborative research that contributes to the scholarly publications of professors, and the second is individual research that could not fairly be expected to rise the level of scholarly publication. This journal is for the second kind of undergraduate research. In fact we would accept any piece of writing, in any discipline or school at the College, that was outstanding in its discipline but could not be expected to be published in scholarly journals — no matter how outstanding it was. That model, it is true, fits the humanities and the social sciences better than it fits the natural sciences, but we would publish any paper that fit this model.

Notice that I have defined the second model of undergraduate research as essentially internal to the undergraduate institution: the work is as good as anyone could hope for, but it cannot be published externally. The first model, by contrast, is defined externally: successful research contributes to work that is published in the wider scholarly

world. This is exactly the definition of undergraduate research that the College's office of undergraduate research uses. This journal is not trying to argue against that definition, but it is trying to provide an alternative to it. This journal is for undergraduate research that, as outstanding as it is and as outstanding as it could be, is research that starts and will be staying here, on the campus of the College of Charleston. And that is why the journal has the subtitle that it does.

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