



Guest Editors' Introduction

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Without our undergraduate research experiences nearly twenty years ago, this special issue of *Pedagogy* may not have existed. It was undergraduate research that prompted our careers as writing scholars, and it is a practice that animates our work today. At a religiously affiliated liberal arts college in the Midwest, Kristine spent the summer before her senior year working as a research assistant for a political scientist, analyzing fifty years of primary texts, learning to code textual data, and writing presentations and conference abstracts. Along with the senior honors thesis she would write the following semester, this mentored, grant-funded research experience convinced her that she would enjoy graduate school and the highs and lows of scholarly research. At a public liberal arts college in the Southeast, Michael entered undergraduate research by participating in the honors program, where he wrote an honors thesis on representations of the goddess figure in literature and published an essay on Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" in the college undergraduate research journal. For us personally and for the students we mentor today, we know that undergraduate research is transformative—and more than intellectually transformative. It is a venue in which students develop identities as scholars, thinkers, and writers, and in which they develop habits of mind that extend into their careers and personal lives.

Today, we work in English departments where questions about the future of English studies specifically and higher education generally are persistent and often troubling. Social scientist Nathan D. Grawe (2018) predicts dwindling enrollments in American colleges and universities by 2025, and

already we see this trend within English studies. The Association of Departments of English (2018) reports that numbers of undergraduate majors are declining, and departments are responding by revising curricula, loosening historical coverage requirements, increasing attention to digital media, and adding tracks in creative writing, professional writing, and rhetoric. At the same time, higher education demographics are also changing. College students today are more likely to attend part-time, to attend online, and to work full-time; over half of college students today have at least one marker of being nontraditional, such as being over twenty-four years old, a veteran, or a parent (National Center for Education Statistics 2015).

We began this project in 2019, and it was these realities that initially shaped our thinking about the potential of undergraduate research in this moment. We believed that undergraduate research could foster new ways of thinking about research in English studies, and we believed that undergraduate research must be accessible to all students even as college demographics change. Days after submitting this issue to reviewers, COVID-19 became our new reality. The widespread economic effects of the pandemic placed even more financial pressure on the humanities, and remote education further upended the idea of a traditional undergraduate. In our first draft of this introduction, we wrote these hopeful words: “It is in this moment that we envision undergraduate research as a future for English Studies—as part of what makes our programs and disciplines vibrant into the future. Undergraduate research can be made inclusive, accessible, and sustainable, but doing so requires us to do some work.” Today, amid this global pandemic, we still argue—perhaps even more ardently—both that undergraduate research must be a central element of the English studies we bring into this new, uncertain future and that doing so will require even more work.

Writing for the American Association of Colleges and Universities, George Kuh (2008: 9) defines undergraduate research as a high-impact practice, one of eleven teaching and learning practices “that educational research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement.” Undergraduate research helps English departments retain and engage students at a time when such goals are financially and pedagogically critical, offering students a sense of personal and intellectual belonging in college and clarity about their goals after college. And these effects on retention and engagement are disproportionately positive for students from traditionally underrepresented groups (Hu et al. 2008; Kuh 2008). Undergraduate research experiences—the experiences that shaped both of us—invite students into our disciplines, and they must be part of a viable and vibrant future for English studies.

Yet high-impact practices are high impact only if they are accessible for all students, and COVID-19 magnifies inequities in higher education. Tia Brown McNair (2016) notes that students of color already “experience fewer high-impact educational practices overall than do white students,” and now we must do even more work to make undergraduate research accessible and equitable. Before we can ask if undergraduate research fosters intellectual engagement and excitement, we must ask if students can afford to stay in college. Before we can ask if mentored research conducted online offers students a sense of belonging, we must ask if students have the secure housing and reliable internet access that allows them to participate. During the summer of 2020, Kristine worked with an undergraduate student in an intensive research program conducted entirely online; the success of the program depended on food and housing security, internet and technology access, the mental health of students and faculty, and even tax reciprocity laws that allowed (or did not allow) students to be paid for their work. Positioning undergraduate research in English studies now requires more work, and as we do this work, questions about equity and accessibility are the first questions we must ask.

This issue begins with a collection of essays addressing the current state of undergraduate research, and together they demonstrate that English studies knows a great deal about how to do undergraduate research well. In the decade since Laurie Grobman and Joyce Kinkead (2010) and Laura L. Behling (2009) prompted critical conversations about undergraduate research in English studies, we have made progress in a variety of areas. These essays illustrate that we have developed best practices and models for mentoring, for cross-institutional collaboration, for circulating the products of undergraduate research in a variety of venues, and for recognizing undergraduate research activity in tenure and promotion cases. And echoing several themes raised in the “Where We Are” roundtable in *Composition Studies* (Davis and Taczak 2020), they also pose new questions about the emotional elements of mentoring and publishing, the need to demonstrate long-term outcomes of undergraduate research experiences, the international scope of this work, and our definition of *research* itself.

We open the section of research articles with the work of Brian Cooper Ballentine, a comparative literature scholar who serves as the Chief of Staff for the Office of the President at Rutgers University and formerly directed its Aresty Center for Undergraduate Research. From his experiences in higher education administration, Ballatine sees English studies at a “moment of opportunity for redefining how and why it trains young scholars,” specifically pointing us to lessons our colleagues in the sciences have

learned for mentoring young scholars. And as we noted above, this “moment of opportunity” has become all the more significant for English studies and the humanities. We are taken by his discussion of the apprenticeship model common in the sciences and find intriguing his challenge to readers of this special issue, namely, “how to translate the many benefits of the apprenticeship approach to research into the scalable setting of the classroom.” With the phrase *apprenticeship*, we think about the ways in which academic labor and undergraduate research intersect.

Writing about her classroom work on public humanities at Carnegie Mellon University, Jamie Smith takes up these very issues. After describing an eight-week first-year composition course designed for students to identify and propose a solution to a public problem, Smith argues that “successful public undergraduate work would mean more public and institutional acknowledgement for the unseen and intensive labor that takes place in the undergraduate classroom.” We then turn to Collie Fulford’s article, in which she reflects on her work with adult undergraduate students at North Carolina Central University, a historically Black university. As Fulford notes, English studies specifically and American higher education more broadly have little research on how adult undergraduates take up undergraduate research experiences. With Fulford’s work, we are excited to see a more expansive perspective of undergraduate research and challenged to “address extant inequities in access to undergraduate research opportunities.” With the idea of the traditional undergraduate student in flux, Fulford offers all readers excellent guidance for working with students for whom college is one of many competing priorities.

The last two research articles represent multiple author teams coming together from varied perspectives. Kay Halasek, Susan Lang, and Addison Koneval, writing from The Ohio State University, describe an upper-division English class that serves as a pathway to an optional senior thesis and engages students with empirical research. While many schools across the Carnegie classification scale offer such a course, what we find engaging about this project is how the author team conceptualizes this class as one of access, as a class designed to engage more students in empirical research. Finally, writing with the support of multiple external grants and from three different institutions, Hannah Franz, Anne Charity Hudley, Rachael King, Kendra Calhoun, deandre miles-hercules, Jamaal Muwwakkil, Jeremy Edwards, Cecily A. Duffie, Danielle Knox, Bishop Lawton, and John Henry Merritt strike at the heart of community and inclusion with this statement: “Academia done in isolation, that centers on the white experience, is of no value to the world at

large.” They challenge us to do better as we move forward with undergraduate research, reminding us that “undergraduate research is the heart of inclusion.” Offering both these compelling arguments and scalable models, this author team helps us better see how graduate education and undergraduate education can come together for truly inclusive education.

The issue concludes with another collection of essays, which illustrate the range of research experiences happening today. In these essays, which are collaboratively authored by undergraduate researchers and faculty members, we see the ways in which undergraduate research is a natural avenue for carrying English studies into the future. It is expanding the scope of research into digital and public spaces, with publicly consequential results; it is using digital technologies to reinvigorate historical and literary texts. The authors of these essays also reveal how entering a discipline as an undergraduate researcher may mean learning how that discipline is shaped by whiteness, linguistic privilege, and socioeconomic privilege—they call attention to the patterns of exclusion that affect undergraduate researchers most directly. In these essays, we see faculty and students working together, experiencing the highs and lows and surprises of academic research, and working creatively around institutional, financial, and personal realities.

For undergraduate research in English studies to move into the future and to fulfill the vision projected in this issue, the field must make two moves. First, definitions of research (and thus undergraduate research) need to evolve. Here we echo Irwin Weiser’s point in this issue: the idea of research has been changing for decades, and it can—and should—continue to change. Research today is broader, more responsive to emergent rhetorical situations, and more publicly consequential. Although we affirm the definition of undergraduate research from the Council on Undergraduate Research (2020), “an inquiry or investigation conducted by an undergraduate student that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline,” we also contend that the terms *original* and *contribution* and *discipline* must be capacious. Being bound by narrow definitions of English studies and its research activities ultimately constrains the possibilities for both our disciplines themselves and the undergraduate researchers we mentor.

Second, undergraduate research cannot be based on only the one-to-one apprenticeship model. As Ballentine argues in this issue, the solo scholar writing scholarly books as an undergraduate carries out bibliographic work is not the model English studies should carry into the future. The authors in this issue demonstrate again and again that collaboration—among students, among faculty, between students and faculty, and among institutions—is

necessary. As we seek productive, inclusive models of collaboration, we hold up the Student Collaborators Bill of Rights from the UCLA Center for Digital Humanities (DiPressi et al. 2015), and we wonder how such a document, which outlines principles for student partnerships with “experienced digital humanities practitioners,” may be taken up and implemented in English studies. We must collaborate as scholars committed to theorizing this work, as institutions trying to support the work, and as faculty trying to make the work happen in our work lives. And we have the scholarly literature and the human capacity to do this work well.

We are confident that undergraduate research can sustain and invigorate English studies, yet we want to acknowledge one of our regrets about this project: we did not ask ourselves enough questions about student voices and student agency. Although we were committed to publishing student voices and sharing stories of undergraduate research, we could not sustain student voices during the long editorial process; undergraduate researchers did not review proposals or manuscripts, and their voices appear alongside their faculty mentors. Just as regularly happens in writing studies, we theorized something (in this case undergraduate research rather than writing) by allowing *the student* to become a generic figure for our own purposes. The *undergraduate researcher* or *student researcher* is necessary for theorizing undergraduate research, but we must be more intentional about bringing actual student voices and perspectives into the scholarship. We need to take student researchers seriously not only as we mentor their work but also as we theorize undergraduate research itself. One place to begin this project is to model colleagues in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, who purposefully include student voices and experiences into conversations about teaching and learning (Werder and Otis 2009; Manor et al. 2009). Another place to begin is in our own work with undergraduate researchers, the present and the future of our disciplines.

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