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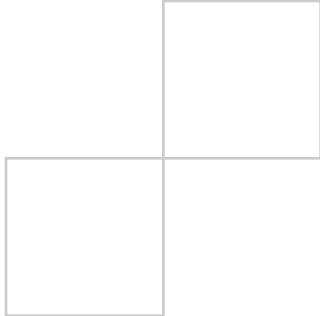
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From the Editors



With every passing year, colleges and universities encourage their students to engage in research as undergraduates with greater intensity. And certainly, this is a good thing – research is educationally transformative, mentally strengthening, and inevitably fosters greater independence on the part of the researcher. But in a way, the formal title of “Undergraduate Research” for such work seems to bifurcate the notion of research into something that one either does or does not participate in. This is especially true when the moniker is used in official programs – say, for example, in the title of this very journal. It can give the impression that only after work is accepted into some program or journal anointed with such a title can it be considered research, and only then does the person become an “undergraduate researcher” who is able to claim all the above benefits.

And that’s silly. But this letter is not intended to be a critique of the moniker or programmatizing. Research, regardless of the field, is something much more profound than merely the benefits it confers on the researcher. It is also much more than can be expressed by pithy statements like “the advancement of human knowledge.” Research is the legacy of our ancestors’ essential need to find answers to the questions that living inevitably confronts us with every day.

Over the millennia, humans have built up immense knowledge on an effectively infinite array of topics, knowledge that fundamentally shapes our world today. But research’s real legacy is less that knowledge itself and more countless generations’ worth of people determining better ways to construct answers to life’s questions. That reflexive need to ascertain truths about nearly everything – say, the behavior of bosons, early Confucian concepts of social order, parental alcoholism’s effects on children, surrealist art, appropriate XDR (Extensively Drug Resistant) Tuberculosis treatment regimens – has built structures for making sense of all the world around us, much of which we pick up in our day-to-day lives. But time earnestly spent in college is unique: students’ energy is primarily spent on learning and exploring this basic human legacy of research, and in an environment that actively seeks to hone and refine those methods. Whether or not you engage in formal “undergraduate research,” college is the time when we take that legacy and make the methods our own.

The image of research-as-ancestral-gift may seem odd, but it is really just an extension of what appears on the previous page in jur’s mission statement. In plain English, it says, “We want to bring different thinkers together in hopes that everybody becomes a better thinker.” So why have undergraduate research programs that encourage it? Very few places in life invest energy in making you a better thinker; most just require you to be good right away. How much we learn from this legacy does much to determine our ability to shape the world in the future.

Sincerely,



Erika Ilagan



Samuel Boyer

Editors-in-Chief