

Letters to the Editor

Undergraduate Research at the University of Rochester

This issue of *jur* includes seven articles describing research contributions of Rochester undergraduates. Recognizing that these articles present only the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of undergraduate research, the editor invited me, in my role of Director of Undergraduate Research in the College, to comment on Undergraduate Research and Creativity on campus. Rochester faculty have a responsibility to nurture and support creativity in all our activities. Although readily evident in our contributions to our professional areas of expertise, this responsibility is an integral component of interactions with students in all disciplines.

The Rochester Curriculum has been characterized (see the Undergraduate Studies Bulletin) in terms of development of Curiosity, Competence, and Community. It seems natural to use these same terms to describe an undergraduate research project. Curiosity stimulates creative work that requires a level of competence to move forward, and is best done by working within a community. Okay, but “How do I begin?”

The first stage in developing a project is to make a connection with a faculty member with expertise in your area of interest. Such connections often originate from faculty-student interactions within courses or as part of the requirements of a major, and on occasion, even from first-year Quest courses. A faculty adviser is an essential component of an undergraduate research project. You will find a faculty adviser associated with each project described in this issue of *jur*. Once the adviser connection is established, subsequent stages of a project benefit from critical review from the adviser. Thus, the first step, after deciding you wish to engage in undergraduate research, is to refine your area of interest and talk with a faculty member with expertise in this area. Departmental web sites and search engines can be valuable resources in this process.

Once completed, the work should be shared with others, either in the form of a thesis, and/or in a public forum such as our annual meeting on Undergraduate Research & Creativity (URC) held on campus each April. Completing a senior thesis, a senior project, or joining the Senior Scholars program represents a capstone to the Rochester Curriculum. For some, the opportunity to participate in research may come earlier, by way of an Independent Studies course, or a summer research opportunity. Regardless of when you find the time to venture beyond traditional coursework, I encourage you to do so.

jur editors have decided to include two new features in this issue to help readers appreciate breadth of opportunities, and thus stimulate the next generation of student participants. On page 49 we list the members of the class of 2003 who received the honor of “Distinction in Research” as part of their degree. Although an impressive list, you should realize that not all departments choose to bestow the honor “Distinction in Research” so this list is only a fraction of 2003 graduates who justifiably earned distinction in research or creativity. For example, my department (chemistry) awards levels of distinction based on overall performance and chooses not to use the “Distinction in Research” option, and thus chemistry graduates do not make the list on page 49. We recognize this limitation, but include the list to highlight students who did receive the honor.

The second new feature in this issue begins on pages 50-51 where the editors describe three undergraduate research programs: The Camelot Project, The de Kiewiet Summer Research Program, and the McNair Program. A statement from a participant in each program adds first-hand insights into the value of participation. Once again, this list is not meant to be inclusive. Future issues of *jur* will highlight other programs other programs.

—Thomas R. Krugh

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and Professor of Chemistry