



# FORUM

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University of Notre Dame College of Arts and Letters

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## *Encouraging Undergraduate Research*

The notion that students can and should do original research has been much discussed and debated. The Boyer Report and other studies emphasize the value of encouraging students to do original work both in the social sciences and the humanities. Among other things, this kind of research introduces undergraduates to the methods and rewards of scholarly research, allowing them to apply the skills and knowledge they learn in the classroom to real situations. Students learn about the accepted conventions for writing and inquiry in their disciplines while gaining an awareness of their own research interests and abilities and new insights into a given subject matter. Perhaps most importantly, undergraduate research has the potential to expand opportunities for students to work closely with faculty members in the spirit of community and sharing.

Mark Roche, Dean of Arts and Letters, adds that:

investigative work fosters active rather than passive learning, promotes the refinement of analytical skills, and allows students to gain experience in some of the processes by which new knowledge is created. In addition, students gain invaluable skills applicable to whatever career path they might pursue as well as increased confidence and other intrinsic rewards that come from successfully completing a substantial research project. Ideally, as more undergraduates are exposed to the joys and benefits of conducting research, a higher percentage of our students will attend graduate school.

Undergraduates who engage in research through UROP are more likely to pursue graduate work than students who do not participate in this program. However, even with this resource, a recent report from Dennis Jacobs, Vice President and Associate Provost, found that only 6% of Arts and Letters students go on to complete a Ph.D.; this compares to 11% of the undergraduates at peer institutions. How can we encourage students to see research and teaching as a possible career path?

Research universities that promote undergraduate research emphasize mentoring as an important first step in fostering student scholarship. This includes setting up a network, identifying faculty research interests by departments, and enabling faculty members to place ads notifying undergraduates of research opportunities. At MIT, each department has a UROP liaison and a mentoring program that pairs upper-class students who have a least one year of UROP experience with undergraduates who have never done a UROP. Other universities provide workshops to help students understand how to initiate a project, to write a proposal, and to see a project to its completion.

At Notre Dame, many faculty members, departments, institutes, and colleges sponsor or facilitate invaluable research, scholarship, and internship experiences for our undergraduates. Yet Dennis has observed that "a majority of our students are unaware that these opportunities exist or are unfamiliar with how to apply for these programs." As a result, The Office of Post-baccalaureate Fellowships has compiled an extensive listing of existing opportunities along with contact information. Dennis has worked with the Notre Dame Web Group to create a single Website, <http://undergradresearch.nd.edu>, where undergraduates from any part of the University can quickly find opportunities that match their interests.

*This is the inaugural issue of the Arts and Letters Forum, which will be published once each semester during the academic year. The purpose of this newsletter will be to share best practices for improving undergraduate teaching and learning. This first issue focuses on the ways departments and individual faculty members have sought to encourage students at all levels to engage in research. Also included is information about funding opportunities through the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) and the Undergraduate Intellectual Initiative (UII).*

*Future issues of the Arts and Letters Forum will focus on developing learning goals and assessing students (and programs) in light of these goals, as well as best practices for identifying and mentoring prospective majors.*

## *Undergraduate Research: The Sophomore Year?*

Dan Myers, *Department of Sociology*

When we think about undergraduate research, we most commonly envision a senior-year capstone project. If students are to conduct meaningful, original research, then it seems to make sense to wait for their most experienced and knowledgeable point before proceeding. But is it really best to wait this long? The past eight years of sponsoring undergraduate research with over 70 students leads me to a different conclusion: start earlier, ideally by the sophomore year.

*“If we want the undergraduate research experience to attract students toward graduate study, it simply must begin earlier.”*

Why is it better to start early? Space prevents a full elaboration of the reasons, but a few are particularly convincing to me. First, research is a skill that is best learned by doing. Classes offer some support, but conducting research is a qualitatively different learning experience that does not necessarily build directly on coursework. In fact, many students claim they appreciated their coursework more because of their research experiences.

Second, decent research projects take time—more time than most students can devote in a single semester or even two. If students start early enough, the project can develop further through the junior and senior years, perhaps culminating in presentation at an academic conference or even publication.

Finally, the senior year often is not best because of the distractions of job searching and the impending conclusion of the college years. More importantly, senior-year research cannot inform immediate post-graduation plans because by the time the project is finished, plans for the following year are long since decided. If we want the undergraduate research experience to attract students toward graduate study, it simply must begin earlier.

Although research can be challenging, even intimidating, to students so early in their college careers, Elizabeth Bullock, a sophomore in Rory McVeigh’s research class in sociology, underscores the role that professors can play as mentors who provide their students “with constant feedback and encouragement.”

“Because I was a sophomore when I enrolled in the class, I had little experience reading scholarly articles,” Elizabeth said. “Professor McVeigh

helped the class to understand our readings by asking us to break down the argument or explain how the readings could apply to our own work. This was especially helpful when I began to work on my literature review. After each draft, he suggested other sources and theories that could contribute to the argument in my paper.

“Completing the project would have been nearly impossible without Professor McVeigh’s evaluations of the progression of my paper. In addition to his written comments on my drafts, he encouraged all of his students to visit his office often to discuss challenges, ideas, and possible improvements for the papers. I visited his office almost every week to discuss the development of my paper. Meetings were even more frequent when I began data analysis. He taught me how to do statistic calculations that were more complicated than what I had learned in my statistics class.

“Professor McVeigh’s hands-on approach to teaching had an immeasurable impact on the quality of my project. It helped the course to feel less overwhelming and made the goal of completing the paper always seem within reach.” ■

## *The Role of the Gateway Course in Fostering Undergraduate Research: The Case of History*

John McGreevy, *Department of History*

The Department of History is now in its fourth semester of offering History Workshop, a gateway course required of all first majors and taught using a common syllabus by history faculty. The department typically offers three sections of just less than 20 students per section each semester. Most history students take the course in their sophomore year.

The course has three goals; the first is to plunge students into the work of writing history from the moment they join the major through interpretation of primary source documents. Twice during the semester, students are handed a packet of primary source documents on, say, Muslims and Christians during the first crusade, the Fall of the Bastille, the Battle of Culloden (1745), or the 1948 presidential election in Muncie, Indiana, and asked to write a 10-page history derived entirely from the primary source documents. The happy result (from the department's point of view) is that students develop their own interpretations of the documents and events, contrast them with those of their classmates, and witness firsthand the messy process of historical narrative and reconstruction.

The second goal of the course is to encourage students to reflect on history as a craft. Instructors have used a variety of texts to advance this goal, but one of the most successful has been Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* on history and memory in contemporary Haiti. Trouillot discusses how historians have viewed Christopher Columbus, which has led to numerous class visits to the Columbus murals in the Main Building.

A third goal has been to provide a common, foundational intellectual experience for our students, allowing them to better know each other, and at least one faculty member, in a small, intensive course from the beginning of their work in the department. We think this familiarity has energized our entirely student-run History Club, which sponsored a record number of events last year. In addition, History Workshop provides an opportunity for instructors to encourage and identify those students who might be interested in entering the honors program in history and completing a senior thesis. ■

*“Students develop their own interpretations of the documents and events, contrast them with those of their classmates, and witness firsthand the messy process of historical narrative and reconstruction.”*

# Learning to Read, Write, and Inquire in an Economics Seminar

Rich Jensen, *Department of Economics and Econometrics*

*“This method does not use sophisticated mathematics or statistics but instead focuses on designing survey questions to induce people to accurately reveal their preferences, so all students were able to participate in these discussions in a meaningful way.”*

Environmental resources have the property that people can benefit from them without directly using them. For example, people may benefit simply from the knowledge that they exist, from the possibility of using them at some time in the future, or from their preservation for future generations. The seminal U.S. Court of Appeals decision in the case of *Ohio vs. Department of Interior* (1989) mandated that such nonuse, or nonmarket, values be included in natural resource damage assessments to the extent that they can be reliably measured. Therefore, courses in environmental economics invariably address the measurement of these nonmarket values.

In my most recent University Seminar, “Economics and the Environment,” I took a new approach to this. I assigned several readings on contingent valuation, the most common method of measuring nonuse value. The students then participated in the construction of a survey instrument that was used to collect data with the goal of estimating the amount that Notre Dame undergraduates were willing to pay per acre to preserve Amazonian tropical rain forest. Several weeks of class discussion were devoted to developing this survey, which described the benefits of the rainforest and its alternative uses and asked whether or not the respondent was willing to pay a certain price to preserve it. Every effort was made in class to reach a consensus regarding

the specific alternatives, the proposed payment method, and the other data to collect from the respondents (i.e., age, gender, ethnic status, religion, family income, and so on). These discussions also focused on using the information from the readings to insure that the survey design incorporated the current best practices in the use of the contingent valuation method. This method does not use sophisticated mathematics or statistics but instead focuses on designing survey questions to induce people to accurately reveal their preferences, so all students were able to participate in these discussions in a meaningful way. After finalizing the survey, each student assisted in the data collection by distributing several dozen surveys in their residence halls. Surveys were also distributed in several large introductory classes.

Although a thorough statistical analysis of these data is still not complete, I was able to report some preliminary results to the class before spring break in the following semester. On average, the students surveyed were willing to pay 10.2 cents per acre to protect tropical rainforest from subsistence farming by squatters, but only 9.3 cents an acre to preserve it from deforestation by timbering companies. Similarly, the probability that a student would agree to pay any listed price to preserve rainforest was 64% higher when the alternative use was subsistence farming than when it was timbering. ■

## Ready, Camera, Action

Don Crafton, Department of Film, Television, and Theatre and Department of Music

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The students have just settled in around a table, reciting their hopes for eventual work in the movie industry. “Director.” “Writer.” “Producer.” The responses attest to the high aspirations of our film students. Then came Todd’s turn: “Foley artist.” Now, the Foley artist is one of the lesser known but key Hollywood craftspersons. She (often it is she) or he is responsible for providing the subtle sounds of rustling clothing, footsteps, snapping chewing gum, and all the little acoustic traces that characters make in films. These sounds are unnoticed by multitudes of moviegoers but crucial for creating the illusion of real presence that is a hallmark of modern films.

What makes this scene remarkable is that it did not take place at Notre Dame but at Skywalker Ranch, George Lucas’ legendary digital sound and image postproduction facility in Marin County, California. The students were in my FTT course on “Sound Design in Cinema” and had personal sessions with several of the most important artist-technicians in the industry. Undergraduate Intellectual Initiative (UII) grants covered the dozen students’ transportation, lodging, and other expenses.

Last year, 10 students benefited from UII support in another course, “Issues in Film and Media Studies,” a capstone course in FTT. The UII grant made it possible for two internationally recognized scholars—a professor of media and television from the

University of Wisconsin-Madison and a professor of film history from Emory—to visit the seminar. Both discussed the graduate programs at their respective schools and the life of a typical graduate student. Later the class traveled to the Chicago Film Seminar, a monthly gathering at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where they listened to a lecture from a renowned film theory specialist from Yale, then joined him, along with Chicago-area graduate students, for dinner and conversation. The classroom visits and the “enhanced” field trip again were subsidized by UII grants.

While wonderful in almost every way, the campus of Notre Dame is perhaps not the ideal cosmopolitan setting for film and media study. Students need real-world experience to see production work being done and actually participate in it, and to see and hear the leading scholars in the field. The Undergraduate Intellectual Initiative program allows students to supplement their local learning with travel and other out-of-classroom experiences designed to demystify the scholarly and creative life that awaits after graduation.

As for Todd, he was invited to be an intern on the second *Harry Potter* film in England. He was not a Foley artist, but he did work on the soundtrack as an assistant to the top Oscar-winning sound designer. ■

*“Students need real-world experience to see production work being done and actually participate in it, and to see and hear the leading scholars in the field.”*

## Taking Students on a Raccoon Hunt: Undergraduates Publishing in Economics

Teresa Ghilarducci, Department of Economics and Policy Studies

*“My second-semester, first-year students published a book! How? I got out of the way.”*

My second-semester, first-year students published a book! How? I got out of the way. The mustard-colored volume *What You Need to Know About the Economics of Growing Old\* (\*But Were Afraid to Ask)* sits in the dean’s case of faculty books (only because I am the editor). The students are now seniors, and one, on her way to dental school, recently told me that of her three years at Notre Dame, she’s never done so much research.

A freshman writing class requires students write. That’s it. They have to write, edit, and rewrite 20 pages. I thought that sounded boring: boring to write, boring to read. Bored writers make lousy writers and we wouldn’t have accomplished anything but 20 tired pages from each student.

So I tried something I learned in Appalachia.

Twenty years ago, my colleague, Larry Marsh, and I took five graduate students to a coal mine. We met literacy teachers who transcribed students’ taped stories; one was about a raccoon hunt. The 40-year-old miner who told the raccoon story was taught how to read by reading his own text. I adapted that technique for my ND “literacy” course.

After three weeks teaching about Social Security and pensions, I

brought in my laptop and recorded the students’ discussion about what they wanted to know. I brought the transcribed list to the next class. They chose an editor, sorted the topics, and assigned chapters. My role was to teach them how to write like an economist; each produced a highly argued essay with a thesis, evidence, and a conclusion illustrated with a table and graph. In doing the book they also learned how scholars share ideas and publish books. They had to present their essays to the other students who became constructive critics and editors. I created a mini-American Economics Association convention.

Kudos to Dean Eileen Kolman who gave each student \$25 for materials. “You mean we can go to Borders or Amazon and buy books we need?” they asked. The \$25 “professionalized” them and I appreciate Dean Kolman’s faith and risk-taking.

I’ve worked hard to find the limits to ND students’ capacity. I probably haven’t yet. Now we know Notre Dame first-year students can write books; what else can they do—write a blueprint for expanding jobs and justice? ■

## Grants Available for Undergraduate Research

Why has violence so often been a political tool of choice in Northern Ireland? How can the media tactics employed by John F. Kennedy in his 1960 bid for the presidency help the next Catholic presidential candidate? Can dominant tamarin cotton-top monkeys repress the reproductive development of subordinate monkeys?

The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP) in the College of Arts and Letters allows undergraduates to answer these and other questions by providing financial support for independent research and creative projects. Participation in UROP is an intense educational experience that exposes students to the entire process of research, from writing the proposal, conducting the research, and analyzing data to bringing the project to closure in the form of a written final report.

The opportunity to engage in research enhances a student's undergraduate experience, blending knowledge from coursework with the development of "hands-on" expertise. Students may independently design their projects or propose a project related to some aspect of a supervising faculty member's research.

UROP provides support for research and creative projects through **Research and Materials Grants** and **Summer Fellowships**. Research and Materials Grants provide up to \$1,500 to be used toward the purchase of materials

and supplies, travel, and other project needs. Summer Fellowships provide funding to allow students to concentrate their time on a project without also having to hold a summer job to pay expenses. Students may apply for one, two, or three months of summer funding at \$1,200 per month (maximum \$3,600). The application process is the same for both programs. For more information, visit <http://www.nd.edu/~isla/>.

**Direct any questions to:**  
Gretchen Reydams-Schils,  
Director, Institute for Scholarship  
in the Liberal Arts  
101 O'Shaughnessy Hall  
631-7531

The Undergraduate Intellectual Initiative (UII) provides funding to faculty and students in support of cultural excursions, travel, and other activities aimed at enhancing teaching and student learning in the context of coursework.

The cap for student funding is \$1,500 per academic year. Students are required to contribute 25% of the aggregate cost of tickets, transportation, lodging, and other incidental expenses. (Arrangements can be made in the event that the student cannot afford to share the cost of these expenses.) Student applications are limited to one per year. There is no set cap for faculty, but faculty applications are also limited to one per year.

All students in good academic standing pursuing an undergraduate degree in the College of Arts and Letters and all Arts and Letters faculty are eligible to participate in the Undergraduate Intellectual Initiative. Faculty and students should complete an application, available in the Office of Undergraduate Studies and at the UII Website, and submit three copies to Sue Penrod in 104 O'Shaughnessy Hall.

Students may submit applications on a rolling basis; these will be reviewed within a week. Applications for faculty will be reviewed three times per year. The spring deadline for faculty proposals is Monday, February 14; the deadline for summer is Monday, June 20. Decisions will be made within a week of the deadline. Applications may be reviewed before the deadline to help with course planning.

**For more information, visit:**  
<http://al.nd.edu/resources-for-undergraduates/research-undergraduate/-intellectual-initiative/>

**Direct any questions to:**  
Stuart Greene, Associate Dean  
Office of Undergraduate Studies  
104 O'Shaughnessy Hall  
631-4573

## *Additional Initiatives*

*The College Gazette* is a student-edited newsletter for undergraduates in the College of Arts and Letters. The *Gazette* aims to foster a lively academic and cultural environment by informing students of the many and diverse activities in the College, including upcoming events, funding opportunities, and awards recently received. The *Gazette* also includes

articles, such as student and faculty profiles written by students. It appears twice per semester both in print and online (<http://www.nd.edu/~alcous/gazette.htm>).

The *Journal of Undergraduate Research* is an annual peer-reviewed journal that serves to encourage and reward original research done by undergraduates in the College of

Arts and Letters. The online edition (<http://www.nd.edu/~alcous/index2.htm>) features the top paper submitted in every departmental discipline, while the print edition contains the best paper from each of three categories: the humanities, the social sciences, and the arts or languages.

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