

Proposal for an Undergraduate Research Journal at Juniata College

SUMMARY

Establishing an in-house journal of student research is a natural extension of the Liberal Arts Symposium. The proposed format is for a twice-yearly online publication that showcases research from all fields, humanities and sciences.

INTRODUCTION

The success of the Juniata College Liberal Arts Symposium testifies to the value our college places on student research. Participation has increased each year since the symposium began in 2006. This year, it included the work of 254 different students—18% of the student body. More than just a forum for student research, the symposium is a tangible sign of Juniata’s commitment to inquiry-based learning as a central part of a liberal arts education.

I believe there is an opportunity to expand the visibility of undergraduate research at Juniata by establishing an in-house journal of student research. Like the Liberal Arts Symposium, it will provide a forum for scholarly work and a culminating experience for student research, and, for the third of our students who pursue graduate studies, it will be a beginning to their professional careers.

A student research journal will accentuate the benefits of the Liberal Arts Symposium:

- **A journal showcases our students’ work to the outside world.** The symposium is a great way to see what other people at Juniata College are doing. A journal will showcase our students’ work to people outside the community. These might include prospective students and their parents, potential employers of our graduates, and graduate programs.
- **A journal provides experience for research students.** Peer review and publication is the natural concluding stage of any successful research project. Just as a presentation at a conference naturally progresses to publication in a journal, work presented at the Liberal Arts Symposium could then progress to publication in the student research journal: it mimics the usual path of scholarship. It will also hone student research and writing skills by providing a low-risk forum for publication. Finally, students will receive the reward of seeing their work in print – an important incentive.
- **A journal provides a permanent record of student scholarship.** Many undergraduate research projects build on one another, with new students picking up where previous students left off. Not only would a journal effectively showcase research already done, but it will provide a knowledge base for future work.
- **A journal demonstrates institutional support for student research.** This in turn raises the reputation of our college within the academic community.

Lastly, I think an undergraduate journal will help students learn the process of inquiry as well as its product (UC Santa Barbara's student journal has a great tagline: "the other half of a great education"). Including research as part of learning isn't a revolutionary thought, and I don't claim that a student journal will do anything that isn't already being done here. Most of that groundwork has already been laid; this just closes the loop.

CONTENT AND MECHANICS AS I ENVISION IT

WHO:

Any student can submit to the journal. Student research journals at other colleges are often restricted to the sciences, but ours should be open to all areas. Any work that has generated new knowledge—that is, has an original thesis that is adequately supported by data—is eligible. Unlike 'real' journals, the purpose of this journal is to educate our students about how the academic world works. This means that it should be open to the broadest possible audience, and therefore the standards for publication will be very low. Once an article goes through the peer-review and editing process, it can be accepted for publication.

WHAT:

Articles can be submitted in one of three forms: (1) full-length, peer-reviewed articles; (2) abstracts; and (3) reprints of articles published the previous year.

- (1) *Full-length articles* will go through a true peer-review process. That is, they will be reviewed by other students. Reviewers could be seniors or advanced juniors in the same field as the author, and be recommended by a faculty member in the relevant department. Faculty members could provide guidance to the reviewers, and the review process itself can become a teaching vehicle. In fact, I think this is a great strength of having student reviewers. Juniata is a small community, so reviews should be double-blind. That safeguard isn't foolproof, however. Students generally know what their fellow students are working on, and they could guess the author(s) based on the topic. There is no way of ensuring complete anonymity. But I don't anticipate trouble if we choose mature reviewers and the editors "review" the reviews before they are sent to the author.
- (2) *Abstracts* will be checked for grammar, etc., but not peer-reviewed. This provides a chance to showcase research that either hasn't been written yet, or is interesting research but due to time constraints, etc., may never be written.
- (3) *Reprints* serve a simple purpose. The best research will probably be published in a "real" journal, but that eliminates the chance to show off our students' very best work. Posting reprints solves this problem. Most journals permit reprints to be posted to an author's website once the article has been released, so copyright should not be a problem. (Top

journals generally don't restrict dissemination at all.) Reprints have already gone through peer-review, so they will be accepted as is.

WHERE:

The student research journal will be an online journal, like the open-access Public Library of Science (PLOS) journals. I created a mock-up of what it might look like and posted it on my web page, faculty.juniata.edu/powell. (I took the research titles and authors from the published Liberal Arts Symposium presentation schedule.) I am not a web designer and this is only to get an idea of what it might look like! Hopefully someone else can make it pretty. I like the idea of adding features such as being able to comment on articles, like a blog, but bells-and-whistles can come later.

WHEN:

I envision this as a twice-yearly publication, released toward the end of each semester *or* at the beginning of each semester. For example, fall research can be submitted in January, review and revision can take place in February through early March, and the issue released in early April. Spring research can be submitted in September, with review and revision in October and early November, and the issue released in early December.

Proposed timeline:

	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Issue 1:					Submit	Review	Revise	Publish
Issue 2:	Submit	Review	Revise	Publish				

HOW:

A faculty editorial board will have oversight of the journal. Their job will be to solicit manuscripts, identify reviewers, make decisions on publication (again, probably close to 100% acceptance), copy edit manuscripts, and publish the issues. I don't see why the whole thing can't be eventually turned over to the students—consider the Harvard Law Review—except that inasmuch as it is to be used as a teaching tool, teachers should continue to be involved.

EXAMPLES

Journal of Ecological Research at Juniata College (<http://departments.juniata.edu/biology/eco/jer.htm>)

Doug Glazier has run a "Journal of Ecology" for one of his courses for some time. His page outlines submission policies and author guidelines, mimicking "real" journals. A great model.

PennScience at University of Pennsylvania (<http://www.pennscience.org/>)

Science Journal at Penn State (<http://www.science.psu.edu/journal/>)

Journal of Undergraduate Research at University of Rochester (<http://sa.rochester.edu/jur/>)

Scientia at Middle Tennessee State University (<http://www.mtsu.edu/~scientia/>)

Earth & E-nvironment at University of Leeds, UK
(<http://homepages.see.leeds.ac.uk/~lecmsr/ejournal/index.htm>)

Vertices at Duke University (<http://www.duke.edu/vertices/>)

MIT Undergraduate Research Journal (<http://web.mit.edu/murj/www/index16.html>)

Caltech Undergraduate Research Journal
(http://www.topgrad.com/caltech_undergraduate_research_journal.htm)