

PROMOTING UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES

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ABSTRACT

Literature on undergraduate research experience reveals that the practice is still much more prevalent in the sciences than in the humanities. The main reason for this trend is differing conventions for professional publication and career promotion among academic disciplines, with the humanities generally demanding single-author work. However, scholarship establishing the positive impact of student-faculty collaborative research is plentiful, implying the need for expansion of humanities student research opportunities. This recommendation is supported by the case study of a collaborative research project, "Approaches to Plagiarism in the 21st Century Academy," produced by an undergraduate English student and myself. Positive outcomes for this student are examined and recommendations are offered for increasing undergraduate research opportunities in the humanities, despite perceived obstacles to disciplines that have not historically promoted collaborative research.

A Lack of Undergraduate Research Experiences in the Humanities

The discrepancy in the number of humanities opportunities for undergraduate research experience, as compared with that in the sciences, is well-documented. Studies have both confirmed the lack and reconsidered **definitions of and approaches to** undergraduate research in order to make faculty/student collaborations **feasible and relevant** for the humanities.

In "Undergraduate Research in the Humanities: Challenges and Prospects," Mark S. Schwartz summarizes the scholarly dialogue that took place at the 2008 conference of the same name. Noting the common understanding that **humanities' professional structures deter scholars from collaborating with students** as well as each other in their research, Schwartz calls for a shift that will benefit both students and professors: "Humanities scholars need to process, share and work to create the kinds of bureaucratic models that will promote research communities" (27).

In "Researching Undergraduate Research in the Humanities," Reed Wilson confirms the short-comings of the existing model. He quotes from the 1998 Boyer Report Commission's follow-up commentary: "The sciences and engineering curricula are well ahead of the social sciences, humanities, and arts, in adapting to undergraduate research as a teaching method" (75). Pointing to currently inadequate models for humanities' faculty load and research funding, Wilson recommends moving toward **salary structures** that treat research mentorship as part of regular faculty responsibility as well as **research funding models** that support such collaboration. Further, noting that **research is often defined differently in the humanities than in the sciences**, Wilson suggests that humanities disciplines employ definitions that recognize the value of what they do: "Even within our discipline, the word 'research' has been problematized... We need to point out that in all disciplines, research is not just finding something that already exists, but an endless...process of discovery that creates knowledge, one in which subject and object interact to create new structures of reality" (77). Revising salary and research funding structures to better support undergraduate research and determining discipline-relevant outcomes for such experiences will enable the humanities to close the gap and better serve students.

Finally, to ensure effective research opportunities for students, it is imperative that humanities disciplines engage in **valid assessment** of undergraduate research in their areas. As of now, according to Chris Crane, et al., "Comparing disciplinary areas finds fewer assessments of undergraduate research in the social sciences and humanities than the natural sciences" (2). To employ this teaching method responsibly over time, humanities entities must gather data indicating whether outcomes are being met and respond to that data to improve practices.

Benefits of Undergraduate Research

For the Humanities as well as for the Sciences

- Higher rates of persistence in studies
- Higher rates of continuation to graduate school
- Improved research skills
- Increased meaningful interaction with faculty and peers
- Improved professional understanding and performance
- Development of problem-solving skills and critical thinking
- Higher level of satisfaction with educational experience

(Based on studies by Brownell and Swaner, 2010; Hunter, et al., 2006; Seymour, et al., 2004; and Bennett and Bauer, 2003)

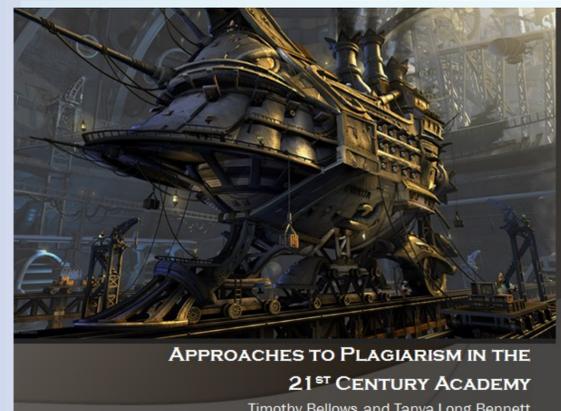
"Collaborative research with social science and humanities faculty positively influences self-reported gains in independent analytical development.... Research experience with subsequent conference presentation of results was the most important activity in improving retention and subsequent admission to graduate school"

(Crane, et al. 2-3)

Case Study:

A Scholarly Collaboration Between Timothy Bellows and Tanya Long Bennett

In spring 2013, student Timothy Bellows produced a freshman composition research paper entitled, "Cryptomnesia: The Grey Area of Plagiarism." Since I was working simultaneously on a proposal to revise our departmental plagiarism policies, I invited Tim to collaborate with me on a presentation for English faculty on four UNG campuses, scheduled for August 14, 2013. After expanding his part of the research to include cultural variance in attitudes toward intellectual property, Tim and I spent several work sessions composing and revising our presentation, "Approaches to Plagiarism in the 21st Century Academy."



Although I was not given a course-release for this and similar work with students, I will be given professional service credit for the faculty presentation as well as faculty development credit for the professional conference presentation. Tim's conference expenses will be funded by UNG's Center for Undergraduate Research, and my own costs will be compensated out of departmental faculty development funds. This structure reflects a partially supportive model common in the humanities; however, it does not address the instruction overload resulting from the mentorship required in such collaborative projects.

After the presentation, Tim completed the Undergraduate Research Assessment Self-Report (below). We plan to submit a revised version of the project for co-presentation at the March 2014 Teaching Matters Conference at Gordon State College. Tim's completed Self-Report indicates that his undergraduate research experience so far has yielded several of the above-listed benefits. As this experience has occurred early in his undergraduate career, I expect that his undergraduate experience as a whole will be shaped by these benefits. His attitude toward his future research projects will likely be more professional and the work more meaningful than it would otherwise have been.

Undergraduate Research Assessment Self-Report

Please provide a brief description of your most recent undergraduate research experience (include dates of research project period):

Name(s) of faculty who mentored and/or collaborated with you in this experience:

Please rate your response to the statements below with 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

1. I will continue my studies until I finish my undergraduate degree. ___
2. I will pursue graduate studies. ___
3. I will pursue graduate studies in the general discipline of this research experience. ___
4. As a result of this research experience,
 - a. My knowledge of the research process has increased. ___
 - b. My knowledge of the research topic has increased. ___
 - c. My meaningful interactions with faculty have increased. ___
 - d. My understanding of professional expectations has increased. ___
 - e. I see myself as more of a professional. ___
 - f. My critical thinking skills have improved. ___
 - g. My problem-solving skills have improved. ___
5. I am satisfied with my educational experience so far. ___



Recommendations

1. Organize humanities faculty work groups
 - To establish specific and relevant outcomes for undergraduate research,
 - To articulate challenges posed by current salary structure and funding models, and
 - To propose realistic solutions to those challenges.
2. Encourage faculty to consider a broad range of research experience options that would meet student outcomes, for example,
 - Conference panels comprising individual student and faculty presentations,
 - Professional conference and/or on-campus symposia co-presentations with students,
 - Student article submissions to undergraduate journals,
 - Research assistantships, and
 - Editorial opportunities with professional publications or conferences.
3. Assess the progress toward outcomes with effectively-designed surveys and careful administration of the assessment process.
4. Publish findings of these assessments to add to the growing body of scholarship on undergraduate research in the humanities.

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