# Editorial

Patricia Ann Mabrouk

## Publishing with *SPUR*: Start with a Great Research Question

### Abstract

A strong *Scholarship & Practice of Undergraduate Research* study begins with the identification of a research question that interests the author, addresses a gap in the literature, and can be developed into an actionable, assessable study.

**Keywords:** *faculty development, research methodologies, research questions, study design*

So, you want to be a *SPUR* author. Where do you start? All of us have identified unique, beneficial, or challenging aspects in our practice of undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry (URSCI). A valuable contribution to *SPUR* starts with the identification of an interesting, relevant, and doable research question that addresses an important issue for the greater URSCI community. Since research is fundamentally an inquiry, ask yourself what aspects or issues related to URSCI pique your curiosity. And, as we all know, if you are interested in a project, you are more likely to see it successfully through to completion, so ask yourself if this project is something you are willing to invest time and energy in investigating.

Good ideas are not born in a vacuum. I would encourage you to read the peer-reviewed URSCI literature, especially the studies that we publish in *SPUR*. Search databases such as the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, and Web of Science on a regular basis. As URSCI is a form of teaching and learning, many of these resources allow you to set up alerts that will send lists of newly published works to your email inbox. Attending conferences such as CUR's ConnectUR is another useful strategy. Another benefit of attending conferences is that it will help you determine whether others see your ideas as interesting and addressing a community need. You also will expand your professional network and find mentors and potential collaborators who may possess complementary technical expertise and resources. Leverage CUR's officers, division representatives, divisions, and the CUR community. Last, don't forget to explore your own backyard. You may find like minds in your own department, the library, teaching center, undergraduate research office, or other units on campus .

Once you have an idea, turn this into a research question that states what you want to learn about URSCI and defines the scope of your interest. A good research question addresses a specific problem or issue of interest to the URSCI community. It is testable within certain time, resource, and other practical constraints. Limiting the scope will help you design a strong study that yields useful results. Important considerations include that the data are representative and generalizable and that the work is ethical, replicable, and reproducible (produces consistent results).

Discuss your research question with friends and colleagues whose experience and expertise will allow you to improve it. This also is a great time to dig deep into the relevant literature to identify others working in the field, learn more about their contributions, and ensure that you are not duplicating previously published work. This effort also can help you identify potential obstacles and choose an appropriate research methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods). Remember that you can always partner with others who possess the necessary expertise and experience. Leverage the strong professional network of peers within your CUR Divisions and the greater CUR community.

Over the next year, I would like to help you develop your ideas and turn them into actionable studies that yield valuable insights into undergraduate research, scholarship, and creative inquiry, which I hope you will ultimately seek to publish in *SPUR*. We plan to publish a series of three commentaries by luminaries in URSCI who are experts in the different types of research methodology listed above. Erin Dolan and Mariel Pfeifer (University of Georgia) will lead the discussion in the fall 2023 issue by considering qualitative methods in URSCI. In the winter issue, David Lopatto (Grinnell College) will discuss the use of quantitative methods. Finally, Jeffrey Olimpo (University of Texas El Paso) will describe the application of mixed methods in URSCI in the spring 2024 issue.

### Editorial Advisory Board Update

With this issue, we are saying a fond farewell to Associate Editor Lisa Gates and Book Review Editor Nicholas J. Rowland. Lisa Gates has been a member of the board since *SPUR* was founded in 2017. She became an issue editor in spring 2020 and was then appointed associate editor in winter 2021. Nicholas joined the board in 2018 and served as the book review editor for five years. I especially want to thank both for their hard work, professionalism, and high standards. It has been a joy and privilege to partner with you, Lisa and Nicholas. I wish you both the best!

I also warmly welcome long-time editorial board member, Kymberly Harris, as associate editor for *SPUR*. Kymberly is the CUR chair of the Education Division and has been a valued member of the *SPUR* Editorial Board since the journal's inception.

We are also welcoming two new members to the Editorial Advisory Board: Merinda Kaye Hensley and Dana Jackson-Hardwick. Dana is actually a returning member of our Board who will now be serving as Book Review Editor. As is our custom, you will find a brief biosketch for each below.

## Journal Update

On behalf of the *SPUR* Editorial Advisory Board and the Council on Undergraduate Research, I am really excited to share with you, our readers, that *SPUR* will be moving to an online-only format as of the fall 2023 issue. This is a major change that will allow us to offer *SPUR* authors and readers expanded services, allow for an increase in the number of articles we can publish in an issue, which in turn should increase and broaden our readership, and promote the sustainability of *SPUR*. We are also making other functional changes to SPUR that you may have already noticed. Technica Editorial Services has developed a series of short instructional videos for authors, reviewers, and editors demonstrating how to perform basic role-specific tasks on eJournalPress. We have now deployed a template for themed proposal submissions to ensure that our editors have the necessary information to properly evaluate proposals. I look forward to hearing your thoughts about the changes you are seeing in *SPUR* and how we can better serve CUR members and the global URSCI community of practice. I want *SPUR* to be your go-to journal for high-quality research in URSCI.

## Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Erin Dolan for invaluable feedback on a draft of this editorial.

## Introducing our new Editorial Advisory Board Member



Merinda Kaye Hensley

*M*erinda Kaye Hensley is Associate Professor and Research Programs Liaison and Instruction Librarian at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). She earned her BA in political science and environmental policy from the University of Arizona and her MS in Library Science from the University of Illinois. She is also affiliate faculty in Informatics, Data Analytics and Information Visualization and teaches as an adjunct professor for the iSchool. In her current role, she leads library initiatives related to undergraduate research including the publication of undergraduate research journals, collecting and archiving undergraduate theses and capstone projects in the institutional repository, and administering the annual *Image of Research -- UR Edition* competition. She has been an advisory board member for the Office of Undergraduate Research since its inception in 2013, serves as lead PI of a triennial campus-wide assessment survey of students' experiences with undergraduate research, and was part of the leadership team for the UIUC Ethnography of the University Initiative from 2013–2018. She has served in leadership roles for the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, the Association of College & Research Libraries, and was appointed a Senior Fellow of Information Literacy for Project Information Literacy in 2020. Professor Hensley's research focuses on the intersections between information literacy and scholarly communication and has been published in premier, peer-reviewed journals in library and information science including *College & Research Libraries, portal: Libraries and the Academy,* and *Communications in Information Literacy*. She is co-editor of a two-volume set, "Undergraduate Research and the Academic Librarian: Case Studies & Best Practices," published by the Association of College & Research Libraries.

# Meet our new Book Review Editor

Dana Jackson-Hardwick

*D*ana Jackson-Hardwick is the Assistant Director of the Office of High-Impact Practices at the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO). She earned an BA in history from the University of Oklahoma, and an MA in history from UCO. Prior to joining OHIP, she served as assistant archivist specializing in government information at the university library for 10 years. In addition to administering many undergraduate research programs on campus at UCO, Dana serves as a Councilor in the Undergraduate Research Program Division with CUR and works with a team of faculty and from both student and academic affairs to provide more equitable high-impact experiences to UCO students. Outside of undergraduate research, Dana enjoys the outdoors, reading, and works so her dog, Jack, can have a better life.