

# **Slideshow**

## **A Journal dedicated to Undergraduate Research in the Humanities**

Published by  
The Center for the Humanities  
Washington University in St. Louis

### **Foreword**

The Center for the Humanities at Washington University was established in the fall of 2002. Included in its mission was explicit instruction to reach out to undergraduate students, an unusual, though, in the end, fitting but challenging, directive for a Humanities Center, largely untried, and perhaps even disdained, if the activities and goals of most humanities centers around the country are any indication. Few humanities centers engage undergraduates, most feeling that their universities provide enough services and activities for them. The centers are largely the province of faculty and graduate students.

As expressly denominated a center, a non-academic bureaucratic unit at this university that does not possess either a teaching faculty or a curriculum, we cannot offer courses. Centers are not meant to compete with departments and programs, which offer courses and design majors, but to complement them in some way. This set-up is probably true at most other universities as well and may be one reason why most centers don't bother with undergraduates, thinking that, outside of courses, there is little to attract them to what humanities centers normally do.

One way that this Center's advisory board thought that we could engage students is through encouraging and supporting independent research for a select number of students who majored in any of the humanities disciplines. Faculty did not often find undergraduate students very helpful as research assistants but thought that as faculty they might be helpful in guiding undergraduates in the student's own research project. What most of us had in mind as a model was the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program, established at Washington University back in the early 1990s and, while open to all students, meant particularly to encourage members of underrepresented minorities to consider pursuing the Ph.D. and becoming university teachers. This two-year program, which accepted a small number of its applicants at the end of their sophomore year, paired the student with a mentor and guided the student through a long-term research project through the structure of weekly seminars devoted to the discussion and analysis of their research. The Mellon students are also provided with a summer stipend and support during the academic year to facilitate their research, permitting them even to travel to archives and attend conferences. The Mellon students also produce annually a journal of their work.

The main difference between the Mellon and the Honors Program launched jointly by the College of Arts and Sciences and the Center for the Humanities is the length of the enrollment. Honors students are selected at the end of their junior year and must be writing an Honors thesis for their major. The rest is the same: a weekly seminar analyzing in depth each student's work, financial support for independent research, and emphasis on the importance of the faculty mentor. Students are selected for this program through consultation with the Honors directors of the various humanities department and programs. Other faculty may nominate students as well and, of course, students may self-nominate. The application process is virtually identical to the

Mellon Program. And, like the Mellons, the Honors Fellows also produce a journal of their work, *Slideshow*.

The work featured here is what was produced in seminar by the students. It is an independent essay, polished and meant to stand alone, extracted from their Honors thesis. For many of them, this effort to produce a free-standing essay from their thesis, meant to read by non-specialists, is an especial and for some an even daunting challenge. But if they are to consider becoming college professors and high-level researchers, they must come to understand this exercise as a necessary and useful skill. Redacting, editing, revising, recasting, reshaping, re-contextualizing are all writing and thinking skills that college professors who publish must have in order to get the most mileage out of their research. Professors must master many different forms of presentation of their work and this is one of the goals of the Honors Fellows Program: to teach undergraduate students how this is done.

Make no mistake; while the students themselves are in charge of producing this publication, it is no amateur indulgence. These essays have been vetted by their mentors, corrected by a professional copy editor, and tested over many months in the crucible of the seminar. There is no guarantee that a student's work will be published in the journal. If the work is found to be substandard and if the student fails to meet the deadlines of the various stages of production, the work is not published. The students are tough on each other. This effort means a great deal to them and they want very much to be taken seriously as contributors of merit to their fields. Moreover, the cost for producing this journal is about the same as it would be for a professional academic journal of the same size. We want the students themselves, the university, and the large community to know that we at the Center take this work seriously as we take any good work in the humanities by our colleagues seriously.

I hope you enjoy reading this journal. If you have any comments about what you have read, we would love to hear from you.

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