



Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 2

April 2015

Letter from the Editor

Julia Turner Ross

University of Tennessee, Knoxville, jross26@vols.utk.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ross, Julia Turner (2015) "Letter from the Editor," *Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/pursuit/vol6/iss1/2>

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Dear Reader,

Before you is the hard work of twenty-three authors and the countless friends, lab technicians, graduate students, and faculty advisors who guided them through each step of the process. For the last year, little teams of scholars and advisors across campus in meeting after meeting and through draft after tortured draft created the documents in this book. I applaud those teams for their perseverance in this process.

Research is rarely straightforward. Fighting to grow comfortable with the absence of a linear process is one of the earliest steps in the undergraduate research process. For many students, undergraduate research is their first experience with taking their education into their own hands- the first time they struggle with their own original questions and the first time they encounter their capacity to create knowledge. The *Pursuit* team is honored to publish the fruits of that struggle – the results of great moments of discovery.

This year, I endeavored to make the review process as inclusive as possible. Our review team numbers swelled as we incorporated new faces and welcomed many first semester freshmen into our work. Our review board members have a special opportunity to dig into the research communities in their specific fields as they review the work of their peers. I feel this opportunity is especially important for freshmen. Research can be intense, but it need not be intimidating. The process can be long, but it shouldn't be opaque – particularly to the freshest young minds on our campus. As we look to the future, *Pursuit* intends to continue to serve as a tool to increase underclassman participation in undergraduate research.

2015 was the first year undergraduate research at UT has had formal institutional support. The establishment of the Office of Undergraduate Research is the result of strong and consistent advocacy from many corners of campus. The myriad of benefits young researchers gain from experiences like the Summer Research Internship, Posters at the Capitol, the Undergraduate Research Symposium, the *Pursuit* peer review process, EURECA, and Research Week have positive spillover effects in the intellectual life of our campus. *Pursuit* looks forward to continued growth under the auspices of the Office of Undergraduate Research, and we appreciate all of the research community members who lobbied on behalf of its establishment.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the faculty and staff who made this publication possible. First, thank you to Dr. Claudia Rawn, our faculty advisor, for supporting yet another generation of the editorial team. I would also like to thank Dr. Marisa Moazen, Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research. Dr. Moazen has always kept her door (and email inbox) open to our editorial team. Her support of our publication has meant a great deal to us, and we look forward to working with her into the future. Finally, thank you to Marianela D'Aprile – the brilliant mind behind the design of the books before you. Marianela has given significant time and energy to this publication through her two-year service as design editor. It is a rich and beautiful testament to the efforts of our community of scholars thanks to her vision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Ross". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Julia Ross

Editor-in-Chief