



## Journal Editorial: “Research as Learning and Being”

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*“You think your pain and your heartbreak are unprecedented in the history of the world, but then you read. It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, who had ever been alive.” —James Baldwin*

Every developing child is learning to understand the world and their place in it. They do this through touching, experimenting, questioning, and watching the world around them; every question they have is their own research question to make sense of their world.

It starts as simple as wondering what happens when an egg is dropped on the ground. Early in my childhood, I realized that there was an unlimited number of questions to ask—an unlimited amount of knowledge to accumulate. Every experience I had triggered questions. Every question and subsequent answer brought about even further questions: historical, present, or future. Through this search for knowledge, the world has always felt expansive and infinite.

As a child, I was fortunate to have access to literary magazines that awakened my desire to learn and explore new topics—even those of no prior interest to me. “Kids” editions of National Geographic and Time provided me with knowledge, but more importantly, they kindled my sense of wonder, curiosity of the world, and desire to learn more. Beyond these magazines, I benefited from having unstructured time, open dialogue with others, and spaces that encouraged curiosity. Just as children benefit from these things, so do adults. College campuses are defined by allowing young adults to think and wonder, and spaces such as OURJ empower students to truly explore these burning questions—to contribute to our general understanding, and to make sense of the world.

Like most young children, I wanted to understand my individual world and also the larger world around me. I wanted to learn about Amelia Earhart, which led to me learning about the Bermuda Triangle, which led to me learning about 16-point compass roses. I had a toy cash register that was made in Yugoslavia; in trying to locate Yugoslavia on a map, I learned that countries could form and countries could cease to exist. And, as my day-to-day life moved forward, I realized that large sociopolitical entities are also changing and are not set structures. As I became older, the themes and topics of my questions changed, but the mechanism of inquiry and investigation remained the same. Of course, not every research question is a brain-unlocking moment. I can remember being a young child investigating where Transylvania was located in my home state of Pennsylvania. But nonetheless, learning to learn is truly an essential skill. How does one navigate the ambiguity of the unknown? How does one initiate investigation of a question? Researchers will tell you that the methodology is more important than any finding. How are constructs like self-esteem operationalized? How are the economic benefits of a policy measured? How is the value of a college degree assessed? Learning to learn is a core skill, and one that is vital to society at large. Having spaces and opportunities like OURJ allows students to learn to learn. This leads to a more informed and knowledgeable general public—a societal value of great importance.

As I gained more knowledge, I also learned more about myself in the process. I learned about who I was and about the spaces that I occupied. I learned how those spaces interacted with the rest of the world.

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The acquisition of knowledge served a dual purpose: understanding myself internally and understanding the world externally. Much of my worldview came to light, for instance, when I learned about the concept of code-switching. Toni Morrison once stated that “language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names.” Research is not simply mixing red and blue test tubes—research is also learning about and describing phenomena that humans experience. It is about putting words to experiences. It is about learning about our world, ourselves, and our history. It is as much about growing as it is about connecting.

There is no better space in our society than a college campus to explore the critical questions of our world. College students are ambitious, driven, and fearless. They are eager and unafraid of tackling the most pressing questions impacting society. The campus spaces they occupy are filled with lively discourse that plants the seeds for lifelong learning and exploration. This undergraduate research journal provides the space for college students to learn about the world and about their selves. I am proud to support the future researchers, scholars, and advocates that have contributed to this journal and trust that the passion for learning will always be with them.