



Letter from the Editor

Kyla Schmitt

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Dear Reader,

As I write this letter—a freshly minted alumni of the University of Oregon, and an environmental scientist in search of work and higher education, during a time when it is particularly hard to find both of those things—I find myself reflecting on my time as an undergraduate researcher here at the UO.

Throughout my four years here, I was lucky to conduct ecological research under the guidance of eight different faculty members (Dr. Bitty Roy, Dr. Haley Burrill, Dr. Peg Boulay, Dr. Eleanor Wakefield, Dr. Addison Koneval, Dr. Jeff Diez, Dr. Dave Sutherland, and Dr. Ellen Fitzpatrick) and, for my term papers, to find incredible research support and assistance with so many more.

I was also fortunate enough to receive eight different funding packages in support or in honor of my research (the *First-Year Research Experience Award*, *Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship*, *College of Arts and Sciences Hands-On Learning Scholarship*, *Owens Writing Award*, *Mentored Research Program Scholarship*, *O'Day Fellowship in Biological Sciences*, *Research Revealed Photo Contest prize*, and *Three-Minute Thesis Competition prize*), alongside numerous other scholarships to support my academic endeavors more broadly.

Significantly, it was also during my time here that UO Libraries decided to grant permanent funding to support the operations and publications of the Oregon Undergraduate Research Journal, which has allowed me to participate in disseminating other students' incredible research projects through *these* issues for three years and counting.

For those of you who are current undergraduates at the UO, I cannot understate to you the importance of taking advantage of the incredible resources offered to you as a member of an R1-university community. I remain stunned by the institutional support I have received since joining the University of Oregon community, and I strongly believe that this support is why I find myself continuing to pursue a future as a researcher today.

Simultaneously, I find myself increasingly worried that classes of students after me will not be afforded all the same opportunities I was. We now live in a time where fascism—and yes, alongside leading historians,¹ I think now is the time to invoke that term—underpins the decisions made by our federal government, not only in its undermining of scientific truth and dramatic slashing of funding for scholarly research,² but also in its tearing away of valued members of our academic communities.³

So, now is the time not only to take advantage of dwindling—but extant—opportunities and resources to advance important research, but to speak up and take action to protect the research, the education, and the very people that make the UO such an incredible place to be. Through these trying times, I hope that

¹ Elisabeth Zerofsky, "Is It Fascism? A Leading Historian Changes His Mind," *New York Times*, October 23, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/23/magazine/robert-paxton-facism.html>.

² Higher Ed Dive, *Tracker: Tracking the Trump Administration's Moves to Cap Indirect Research Funding*, published June 19, 2025, <https://www.highereddive.com/news/tracking-the-trump-administrations-moves-to-cap-indirect-research-funding/751123/>.

³ Tarek Anthony, Ysabella Sosa, and Jasmine Saboorian, "Three Additional UO International Students Face Deportation," *Daily Emerald**, April 8, 2025, <https://dailyemerald.com/163668/campus/three-additional-uo-international-students-face-deportation/>.

the UO will continue to value and prioritize truth, discovery, and community wellbeing. I hope that all of you will do your part by advocating through contacting your leaders and representatives, donating to organizations (see, for instance, the New York University School of Law's *Institute for Policy Integrity*) that seek to defend these values, and asking the challenging questions and seeking their nuanced solutions—the process we as academics often refer to as research.

Going forward, I will remain committed to supporting inquiry and advocacy on the UO campus, even as I gather up my diploma and chart toward my own uncertain future. And OURJ, for its part, will remain committed to the accessible and free publication of this cutting-edge student research. Here, the pages that follow contain some of the best of our Oregon undergraduates' recent research.

Sincerely,

Kyla Schmitt, Editor-in-Chief