

Journal Editorial: “From Journal Dreams to Major Teams”

In Conversation with OURJ’s Founder: Lucy Gubbins, 14 Years Later

For Lucy Gubbins (UO’ 12), a deep-seated love for the University of Oregon and the excitement found in the rigor of undergraduate research was inevitable. The bridge, however, that would eventually take her there—from simple beginnings as an undergraduate to making waves for major companies like National Geographic and Amazon—as it turns out, wasn’t a bridge she would cross, but one she would build from scratch, alongside a team of undergraduates looking to create a home to publish extraordinary works of student research.

Lucy’s love for research sprouted from a passion for language, specifically Japanese. As a native Tennessean, she chose to attend the University of Oregon to excel in its language program. “I had a huge passion for Japanese. They had one of the best Japanese language programs in the country. I had lived in Japan as an exchange student, so I had a certain degree of comfort in Japanese but really wanted to excel in it.”

It was only after taking some language classes that Lucy realized her true interests lay in understanding the underlying mechanics of things. “I actually realized that my passion was really for understanding how languages work and how non-native learners learn languages, which was really exciting to me.” Lucy attributes her start in research to tons of faculty in and around the UO. One in particular was a professor in the languages department: Kaori Idemaru. After taking an introductory languages course with Kaori, “she asked me to talk to her after class, and I was really, really nervous...I was this freshman, she’s probably feeling like I’m falling behind, but instead she asked if I was interested in becoming a research assistant for her...I said *absolutely*.”

This connection would eventually lead Lucy to work on a research paper with Kaori, and one that would end up getting published. But the struggle at the time could be found in unknowns, the many complexities behind the publication process, and the many questions she had surrounding what it meant to be an academic researcher. “It’s hard to bridge that gap between being an undergrad and being a PhD or research scientist at a large university,” Lucy said.

This curiosity and drive to bridge such a gap led her to start playing around with an idea of a new resource: an undergraduate research journal of their own. “I was just looking for all these resources, for a way to highlight some of the work I’d done, but there’s that gap between an actual publication versus what I was doing now...which was not quite at the publication phase. I just was craving that, and it was hard to find resources and other undergraduates who were doing similar work. That’s when I started toying around with the idea, what if we had a journal for undergrads to go through that process of publication and peer review?”

Written By: Annika Segesta, a senior double majoring in Media Studies and Psychology, with an interest in pursuing future careers in both media analysis/journalism and mental health counseling. She is the president of the student-led film club UO Presents and enjoys connecting with others over various kinds of media. She is particularly interested with research in social media and its impact on modern political bias. During days off, she enjoys creating digital and physical art, getting outside, and connecting with friends and strangers.

Many conversations with supportive faculty, and plenty of posters up on campus later, and “the coolest people came out of the woodwork...we all got together and decided this was something we were really passionate about, and it just went from there.”

With the founding of OURJ, undergraduates at the UO for the next 14 years would now have a place to go to publish their works, allowing students to be able to share their research with a broader community of researchers, with OURJ serving as a guide to help lead them through the peer-review process. It wouldn't be easy, as OURJ's team of editors alongside Lucy would then go through the rigorous process of deciding what and what not to accept. “[It's] this idea that you are always trying to raise the quality and rigor bar higher and higher. I think the seed of that was planted being a part of OURJ, where we had to decide, an undergraduate journal is new to people, so what is the quality bar?”

Lucy now works as a senior User researcher at Amazon Inc., but she has also taken many roles, such as being a program manager for National Geographic. As a user researcher for Amazon, Lucy's job is all about understanding how people go about their day-to-day lives. “I've done everything from understanding how people shop for bananas on the internet and the myriad of complexities that come with that. I've worked on Alexa, Echo, and device shopping. My role is all about understanding how I can make [people's] jobs a little easier.”

Fourteen years later, Lucy still credits the skills learned as Editor-in-Chief of OURJ as things she would incorporate into her many professional endeavors, taking the role of being this bar raiser, but also realizing how to be attentive to people's needs. “[It's] talking to people about what you see this community becoming, what do you want this to be, what do you want to be engaged in? In OURJ, we were constantly asking each other, researchers, and undergraduate students what do you want to see, what do you want this to turn into, what would really excite you? And that's something I use every day as a UX researcher, if you want to build something, if you want something to be good, you have to talk to the end user, and that could be a digital platform that serves millions of people, or an undergraduate journal.”