



Guest Editorial—“The Power of Undergraduate Research”

J. Josh Snodgrass, Professor of Anthropology & Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research and Distinguished Scholarships

When I first set foot on the campus of the University of California, Santa Cruz as a community college transfer student from a low-income background, I had no idea that research was even a possibility for undergraduates. In fact, I honestly don't think I even knew that research was being conducted on campus at all. But then a serendipitous event changed my life. A new professor at UCSC, Alison Galloway, approached me—one of the top students in her human osteology class—and asked if I would be interested in assisting her with her osteology research and forensic anthropology casework. I jumped at the opportunity. Over the next two years, I worked on dozens of forensic cases from all over northern California—the remains of a homicide victim near Yosemite, an unidentified body from the Monterey Bay, and a storage unit filled with unknown cremains—and collaborated on research with Professor Galloway and the Los Angeles County Coroner.

My undergraduate research experience was truly life-changing. I learned to work as part of a team. I learned to formulate and test hypotheses. I learned public speaking skills and how to present at a conference. And I learned how valuable my skills could be when applied to medicolegal issues. Never before had I been so intellectually stimulated and never before had I felt so valuable, like I had skills that others needed. And I was needed, for my undergraduate forensic experience led me after graduation to human rights work in Bosnia and Croatia, working for Physicians for Human Rights and the United Nations to build a legal case against perpetrators of genocide based on physical evidence from mass grave sites such as Srebrenica and Vukovar. I would not be the same person I am today without those experiences and I am forever grateful to Professor Galloway for opening my eyes to this amazing world.

When I started as a professor at UO in 2005, I was thrilled to be in the position to involve undergraduates in my research, to look for ways to enrich their academic experience and change their lives. Over the last decade and a half, I have mentored dozens of students in my Global Health Biomarker Laboratory and they have done cutting-edge research on topics as varied as inflammatory bowel disease among indigenous Amazonians, rural-urban differences in sleep among older adults, and risk factors for cardiovascular disease among native Siberians. Although I knew that these experiences would be transformative for my students, what I did not anticipate was how much this work with students would enrich my life. I am energized by their passion, heartened by their commitment, in awe of their talents. And now, from my position as Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Research and Distinguished Scholarships, I have

expanded this work to coordinate undergraduate research opportunities across campus. Every day I learn about new and exciting research that our students are doing, some of which you will learn about in the pages of this issue of OURJ.