

# Where We Are

## Networking Undergraduate Research: Where We Are, Where We Can Go

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Knowing where we *are* in undergraduate research (UR) in writing studies requires knowing where we *have been*—and how we got here. In retrospect, this development looks less like something planned by an architect and more like the evolutionary fits and starts of multiple invested residents (far more than we can name in this short piece) responding to environmental needs.

### Making UR Public

UR in our field became more public when Candace Spiegelman and Laurie Grobman launched *Young Scholars in Writing* in 2003, providing space for the products of emerging writing studies researchers. Presentation and publication venues have grown exponentially, adding venues such as *Xchanges* (est. 2001), *The Pulse* (now *Inquiries*, est. 2009), and *The Jump* (now *Jump+*, est. 2010).

Seeing the potential of this work, CCCC leaders established the CCCC Committee on Undergraduate Research (5CUR) in 2011 to survey members about UR and to author the *CCCC Position Statement on Undergraduate Research in Writing: Principles and Best Practices* (2017) and its accompanying annotated bibliography (added October 2018). In 2017, the Executive Committee granted 5CUR Special Committee status, allowing it to be reconstituted annually to implement the CCCC Undergraduate Researcher Poster Session, collect and circulate research about UR in the field, and coordinate with the broader UR community. 5CUR supports research-informed, mentored UR and equips CCCC members with public-facing resources for making evidence-based arguments for tangible support for UR at their institutions.

While serving on the CCCC Executive Committee, Jessie pitched a proposal for an Undergraduate Researcher Poster Session (see <http://www.writingfaculty.net/undergraduateresearch/>) to 2012 Program Chair Chris Anson. UR schedules often do not align with the regular CCCC proposal deadline, so Jessie proposed a later review process for UR posters. A planning team advertised the call for proposals, reviewed submissions, coached accepted presenters' poster development, and created resources for undergraduates navigating the convention. Chris scheduled the poster session adjacent to the 2012 opening session, ensuring strong attendance in support of the undergraduate present-

ers. Subsequent program chairs offered similar support, and the planning team quickly evolved to include former presenters and other students.

The CCCC SIG, which has met since 2013, functions as another community of practice for UR mentors and UR presenters. While the SIG meeting occasionally features research projects, it more often serves as a gathering space to share UR initiatives, including national efforts like the poster session and the Naylor Workshop, as well as projects at attendees' institutions.

### **Naming *How We Know*: From Product to Process**

Another serendipitous moment came in 2013. Provided with an endowment funded by Irvin S. Naylor to support the work of writing studies, Dominic faced a question: what needs still existed in the matrix of rapidly-evolving work in undergraduate research? Answering this question required an environmental scan similar to the one provided in this essay.

Dominic saw that publication and presentation venues had highlighted the work products of undergraduate researchers. But, as Dominic and Cindy Crimmins noted in their 2010 chapter in *Undergraduate Research in English Studies*, while students in their Teaching and Tutoring Writing course were becoming increasingly interested in the research *topics* of our discipline, they had little experience with our research *methods*, for the reasons articulated by Laurie Grobman and Joyce Kinkead in the same collection:

Our suspicion is that we as faculty have not articulated to our students the methodology of inquiry in our fields. . . Though the scientific method is transparent, this is not always the case in the humanities. We may not always agree on a process of inquiry; some might even call the discipline fragmented. (Grobman and Kinkead x)

Undergraduate researchers, who had new opportunities to present and publish their work, had fewer opportunities to engage with the methods of our field, except through the heroic—and often unrecognized—work of their faculty mentors. But, frankly, it was more than that. Even with seven full-time faculty in York College of Pennsylvania's Writing program, for example, mentoring that accounted for the rich array of methods that exist in our field was not possible. Both students and faculty members needed help. So, Dominic, Cindy, and one of their trail-blazing undergraduate researchers, Megan Schoettler, decided that the space they could best occupy was finding ways to name *how* we know—to offer students, and their mentors, a way to learn research methods that support the rich fields of inquiry of our discipline. Impressed by the work of the Elon Research Seminars and the Dartmouth Summer Seminar—which brought together scholars to learn from one an-

other—they built a workshop that would do similar work for undergraduate researchers. In effect, they sought to back-fill the gap that Grobman and Kinkead had identified, to help undergraduate researchers learn from a larger group of mentors and create their own community of researchers within our discipline.

Launched in 2014, with the help of generous scholar/mentors, this workshop has been attended by over 140 undergraduates from 39 states, three countries, and 45 different institutions, as well as about 20-25 scholars each year—who have also learned a great deal from each other. Then, in 2018, a group of 43 scholars gathered for the Naylor Symposium to assess the state of UR in our discipline and to make recommendations for its future. The result was *The Naylor Report on Undergraduate Research in Writing Studies* (2020).

During this period, although not focused specifically on UR in writing studies, the 2014-2016 research seminar on Excellence in Mentored Undergraduate Research, hosted by the Center for Engaged Learning at Elon University, and Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) conferences and publications also shaped practices in our field by advancing scholarship on mentored UR.

In 2016, Joyce Kinkead published *Researching Writing: An Introduction to Research Methods* to teach undergraduates “how to conduct ethical, authentic research” in writing studies by introducing a “range of methodological approaches—both humanistic and social scientific” to the discipline’s novices (xvii-xviii). It also outlines course frameworks that can help professors build authentic projects for students within the context of a class. Likewise, Lauren Fitzgerald and Melissa Ianetta included in *The Oxford Guide for Writing Tutors: Practice and Research* (2015) chapters on research methods that help writing center tutors generate research projects based upon both their lived experiences and the field’s methods.

While this short piece cannot chronicle all the efforts of countless thoughtful scholar/mentors who have fueled this movement, these moments demonstrate how key work synergistically provides a future for the continued growth of UR in our discipline. So what’s next?

### **Next Steps: Networking to Connect**

UR in writing studies has grown naturally *from* needs, and *through* a combination of commitment and serendipity. Although individual people, events, and publications have moved this work forward, they often operated in distinct orbits with minimal coordination. As we look forward, the next natural need may be greater synergy— or, in the spirit of Kristie Fleckenstein, Clay Spinuzzi, Rebecca Rickly, and Carol Clark Papper’s (2008) ecological metaphor, “harmony.” As such, we challenge the field to imagine what might be possible with more networking among these efforts. As 5CUR takes owner-

ship of the annual poster session, for example, how might SIG members and other UR mentors collaborate with 5CUR to invite additional participation by Naylor scholars and other students? How might access to the benefits of UR in our field be widened to include more underrepresented groups? How might networking scaffold students' development of publications based on their presentations? And how might building on the national network of Naylor mentors facilitate a community of practice that extends beyond place-based events like the Naylor Workshop and the CCCC SIG? Looking back on nearly 20 years of professionalization of UR in writing studies, we are optimistic that the field's capacity for networking will expand access to and enrich the quality of mentored UR for our next generation of colleagues.

### Works Cited

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