



The journal can help students showcase their work to graduate schools and potential employers.

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‘More than a grade’

James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal provides publishing opportunity for students to gain credibility outside classroom

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The Breeze

As undergraduates progress through their schooling, many conduct research endeavors, scholarly work and multimedia projects. The James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal has created an opportunity for undergraduates to have their work displayed beyond the classroom and be published for a wider audience to establish a level of professionalism and credibility.

While there have been multiple undergraduate research journals over the years at JMU, the JMURJ is the most

recent publication open to students. It was reconstituted in 2013 from the 2007-09 version, which lasted for one volume. The goal is to allow students to see what work they may be involved with after college and promote the idea that students from every discipline can participate.

“We designed it from the ground up, thinking about what the university needed, what would work practically and how it could be sustainable over the years,” Kevin Jefferson, the JMURJ adviser and writing, rhetoric and technical communication professor, said.

Jefferson worked with WRTC instructor Scott Lunsford and nine undergraduate

students to ensure diversity of disciplines throughout the start of the journal into the sixth edition, which is currently in the publishing process.

Including students from different areas of expertise to publish research is aimed at breaking the stereotype that research is only done by graduate students or professors and encourage students to engage with the community beyond the classroom.

After students submit their projects, a team of JMU faculty peer reviews them to decide whether to approve the piece for publication. Last year’s edition included 10 different pieces. They’re hoping to match that number this year.

NEWS

According to Daniel Vieth ('15 BA, '17 MA), author of "That Sucks?": An Evaluation of the Communication Competence and Enacted Social Support of Response Messages to Depression Disclosures in College-Aged Students," published in the third volume of JMURJ, submitting work for publication can also improve writing skills and confidence. His scholarly article focuses on the idea of how communicating with others can help people deal with depression in a better way.

Vieth worked on the article as a class project in fall 2015 because he saw it as an opportunity to bring some positivity to the topic of depression. After seeing a promotion email from JMURJ, Vieth spoke with his professor to try and take his article beyond the classroom.

"The fact that you can do a whole lot more with your article or whatever you do, it takes it beyond what it was," Vieth said. "You improve the article a lot, it sort of pushes your batteries on how good can you make this project. Other people can find your article and it's peer reviewed, so it goes through the real journalistic message and people can actually cite it. It adds so much more value to the project and makes it worthwhile."

The three rounds of editing and revisions that Vieth went through with JMURJ after submitting his work were in an effort to make sure his writing was the best quality before publication. According to Vieth, the process helped him become a stronger writer, and he's now able to apply it to his current job.

"It was extremely valuable for when I wanted to join a graduate program," Vieth said. "I was able to go into my graduate program and say I've already had something published, because in grad school that's a big thing to do academic articles and bring them to conferences and get things published. It started a chain reaction — helped me get into grad school, gave me

a lot of experience of working with a higher caliber of articles and papers, which helped me get through graduate school, then I got my master's degree and that helped me get a job. It really helped me kick-start my career and having something published like that is a big confidence boost for sure."

Each submission is directed toward the scholarly field it's under with its respective formats and style conventions in mind. According to Jefferson, there have been 450 submissions since the restart of the journal in 2013, totalling about 85 per academic year.

"I think it's definitely benefited the students because it can show what they have studied in their undergraduate career," Dana Webb, JMURJ head of marketing and design and senior media arts and design and English double major, said. "It's a major accomplishment to get their work published because it can be seen all over the world. It's not just seen by people at JMU."

Journals have been published from all seven undergraduate colleges, enabling each student involved to build their resumes and gain experience in their scholarly fields. The rigorous publishing process also exposes students to the editing process of a peer-reviewed journal.

"This journal offers the possibility that what we do here at JMU is for more than a grade, more than a professor, more than a prompt," Jefferson said. "Instead it has valid, vital meaning for a larger audience. It exposes a range of ways of communicating and of knowing the world that we teach, learn and share here."

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