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## Using External Review in the Honors Project Process

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JOYCE W. FIELDS

# Using External Review in the Honors Project Process

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Understanding the competitive nature of applications to graduate programs, Ferrari and Davis (2000) surveyed psychology faculty to discover their level of awareness of resources for undergraduate research publication. They found that most of the psychology faculty members they surveyed were unaware of such resources. Their finding made me curious about how many honors directors, faculty, and advisors are aware of such resources for their students not only in psychology but in all disciplines across the curriculum. Most of us realize the importance of helping our students become competitive for graduate work, and we know that publication and/or presentation of research may add to their chances for acceptance into the program of their choice. For many of our honors students, the capstone project in their major, which is also typically their honors project, may represent opportunities for increasing their marketability in graduate and professional arenas.

Aware of the requirements for both capstone and honors projects for our honors students, our social science department was faced with the task of finding a method for reducing duplication for honors students and mentors. The obvious solution was to join the senior research project (capstone) with the senior honors project, but we had to find a way to differentiate honors from non-honors student projects. The solution for this department was to introduce external review for honors students, and this may be a fairly easy option for collaborative efforts between departments and honors programs elsewhere. External review for this purpose takes three forms: review for undergraduate or research journals, for conference presentations, or for grants.

Many institutions have lists of publication resources available for students through publication or research offices. On small college campuses, however, these offices are rare, so it is incumbent upon honors directors to collect such sources, publicize them among their honors faculty or teachers, and encourage such scholarship among students. Publicizing these sources on an honors website allows student access to information that encourages their research and creative efforts while also making them responsible for the submission process and external review. We have had little experience with undergraduate publication because (1) it is a recent addition to our options and (2) our capstone is required in the fall of the senior year, leaving little time for review and revision prior to graduation. However, if a program has an academic progression such that

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capstone/honors projects are completed earlier in the academic career, submission for publication is a viable option. Several of our students have submitted their projects for publication in scholarly journals, but the review process is so lengthy that the benefit is in preparing a project for submission rather than having a project accepted for publication. One student whose undergraduate research was accepted for publication was revising her paper deep into her graduate work. Depending on academic scheduling and the goal of submission (preparing a manuscript for external review and/or being successful in publishing), undergraduate research journals can be an excellent resource for defining and differentiating the honors project from other capstone projects. A list of useful websites is provided in Appendix B.

Three particular lists merit special attention. The website for Undergraduate Journals and Conferences Directory (<http://upd.mercyhurst.edu/>) is categorized by topic listings of over fifty journals across the curriculum including arts and creative writing, economics, history, honors, international affairs, mathematics, natural science, philosophy, political science, and psychology and cognitive sciences. Additionally, it provides the student with guidelines for publishing. The Council on Undergraduate Research ([www.cur.org/ugjournal.html](http://www.cur.org/ugjournal.html)) lists over forty publication sources. The list is not arranged topically, but the journals are provided as direct links on the CUR website to allow easy access. The third list is provided by the Journal of Young Investigators ([www.jyi.org/resources](http://www.jyi.org/resources)) and includes links to categorized resources ranging from science and news to education and creative writing. Also, tapping into sources on the web from other colleges and universities (University of North Carolina or Creighton University, for example) that have compiled such lists is helpful. Many of these sites provide information for students about submission policies and writing styles, and they allow students the luxury of “shopping” their work to see which journal may be the best fit for their project. External review in this context provides the student with an opportunity to produce her best work, get professional feedback, and experience the mechanics of academic publication.

The second source for external review for our students is submitting their project for presentation at a professional or student conference. Several years ago, one of my students presented a poster at a large research conference and was the only undergraduate at the conference to win recognition for her work. As a result, she decided that maybe she could attend graduate school; she has since completed her master’s degree and is working on her Ph. D. We have similarly enjoyed our students’ presentations at regional and national honors conferences. The opportunity to present research in a meaningful format and then exchange ideas through poster sessions or presentations provides practice in multiple skills such as conducting research and communicating about it in both visual and verbal media. Our students come back to our campus revitalized, energized, confident, and more mature.

One of the most popular sources for presenting undergraduate research is the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research ([www.ncur.org/ugresearch.htm](http://www.ncur.org/ugresearch.htm)). This annual conference is open to all research disciplines and the

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performing arts, and it usually takes place in late spring to facilitate the project process. The deadline for abstracts is normally late in the first semester so that students can apply for review prior to the beginning of their second senior semester. Their website is rich with information regarding NCUR's purpose and their belief in the value of undergraduate research and scholarship.

Other excellent venues for student scholarship presentation are NCHC and regional honors conferences. Our students have received useful feedback from both general sessions and poster presentations at these conferences and have enjoyed the intellectual exchange of information available in the conference setting. The Journal of Young Investigators web site ([www.jyi.org/resources/conferences](http://www.jyi.org/resources/conferences)) offers a list of additional conferences targeting undergraduate submissions. We have also found state association conferences also to be rich venues for student presentations in professional areas such as social work, speech and language pathology, education, and communication.

The third possibility for external review is applying for a grant to fund either the entire project or a component of it. We have identified local granting agencies such as state arts associations as target options for our honors students. Researching and writing grants is a powerful experience for honors students who often parlay it into greater marketability in their post-baccalaureate job search. At Columbia College, we have developed a system of microgrants to enable students to find mentors and write grants early in their academic careers. A copy of the grant philosophy and criteria is attached. These small grants allow students to purchase software, travel short distances, print art work, purchase limited lab equipment, and visit historic libraries and other sites. When students succeed early in their academic careers in writing and receiving grants, they are more willing to risk the external review process for the more ambitious research/creative projects that evolve into their senior honors work. Faculty mentors who facilitate these early grants are awarded a small stipend in the form of increased faculty development funding. On our campus, these grants are not limited to honors students and are funded through faculty development monies. If restricted to honors students, such grants are a fairly economical investment in student work from the honors budget.

Our students have been successful in obtaining grants from the South Carolina Arts Commission, the South Carolina Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, and various specialty competitive research grants originating on our own campus. One SCICU Grant enabled a student to travel from South Carolina to Utah to work with children on an Indian reservation. Another student used these grant funds to design and implement an online survey and purchase interpretative software. Student research grants are available across disciplines, and our students have received funding in the areas of biological sciences, visual arts, psychology, education, sociology, history, and political science. The grants require formal presentation and justification of spending so that the experience extends from research to grant administration and responsibility for the fiduciary health of the project.

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When honors faculty members are aware of sources for external review for undergraduate work, they can target specific journals or conferences or grants that may apply to their specific discipline. Additionally, there are multidisciplinary targets that provide students and mentors with interesting possibilities for academic growth. With the wealth of undergraduate journals, conferences, and grant possibilities, students are well positioned to complete their honors projects with an eye toward external review and public presentation.

### REFERENCES

Ferrari, J. R. & Davis, S. (2000). Undergraduate student journals: Perceptions and familiarity by faculty. *Psi Chi Honor Society*, 4. Retrieved September 10, 2007 from [http://www.kon.org/ferrari\\_davis.html](http://www.kon.org/ferrari_davis.html).

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## APPENDIX A

### COLUMBIA COLLEGE COLLABORATIVE FACULTY/STUDENT MICROGRANTS

#### **Target**

Four MicroGrants have been budgeted for the 2007–2008 academic year. The goal of these grants is to mentor first and second year students in the grant writing process and build interest in other grant opportunities (Savory PURL, SCICU, etc), although the grants are not limited to first and second year students. These grants are not to be used for routine academic credit but for stimulating creative interest in topics outside routine classroom requirements.

#### **Funding**

The maximum amount a student may request for the grant is \$500 to be applied toward travel, research instruments, software, materials, student stipend (not to exceed 50% of funded grant amount). The student stipend payment amount is \$6.00 per hour. The funds are not to be used for travel for presentation of information at conferences or meetings. The faculty mentor will receive an additional \$200 in faculty development allowance.

#### **Timeline**

Grants will be reviewed by the Faculty Development Committee and awarded in the spring semester of the academic year for completion during the summer and fall of the next academic year. In April, the Faculty Development Committee will sponsor reports to the faculty on these grants.

#### **Proposal Format**

MicroGrants applications were designed according to other grant proposal outlines to include: the project title, the project rationale or description, a methodology or outline of how project goals will be accomplished, a list of desired outcomes, a detailed budget, an outline of both student and faculty mentor responsibilities, and a list of references. (see attached form)

#### **Questions and Concerns**

All questions and concerns may be addressed to the Director of Faculty Development or to a member of the Faculty Development Committee.

## C2 MICROGRANT PROPOSAL

**Semester** \_\_\_\_\_ **Year** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number (required for stipend) \_\_\_\_\_

**Faculty Mentor** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

**Department Chair** \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

- I. Project Title
- II. Project Rationale or Description  
(Please include a *brief* literature review of the topic and a statement of why it is of interest to the collaborators. You should include a concise statement beginning with "The purpose of this (research, project, study) is . . ." What are your goals?)
- III. Methodology  
(This is a statement of how you plan to accomplish your goals. You should include an expected time line for points until completion).
- IV. Desired Outcomes  
(What do you hope or expect will be the result of this work)
- V. Budget  
(Please include all expected expenses and a brief description of how these funds will further your project).
- VI. Planned Student Activities and Responsibilities  
(Bullet points of the student's responsibilities)
- VII. Planned Faculty Mentor Activity and Responsibility  
(Bullet points of the faculty mentor's responsibilities)
- VIII. References  
(in appropriate format)

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## APPENDIX B

### WEBSITES FOR PROMOTING SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH ON THE SMALL COLLEGE CAMPUS:

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<http://upd.mercyhurst.edu>

Undergraduate journals and conferences directory

<http://www.cur.org/ugjournal.html>

Council on Undergraduate Research

<http://www.jyi.org/resources>

*Journal of Young Investigators*, Undergraduate peer-reviewed science journals and conference listings

<http://www.unc.edu/dept/our/urj2.htm>

list of journals from UNC's office of undergraduate research

<http://www.ncur.org/ugresearch.htm>

The National Conference on Undergraduate Research web site, full of information about their conference and some pedagogical justifications for undergraduate research

<http://view.fdu.edu/default.aspx?id=784>

*Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*

<http://puffin.creighton.edu/psy/journal/studentjournals.asp>

A listing of undergraduate student psychology journals

[http://www.kon.org/CFP/cfp\\_urjhs.html](http://www.kon.org/CFP/cfp_urjhs.html)

Undergraduate research journal for human sciences (excellent section of instruction for authors)

<http://jgbc.fiu.edu>

A forum for publishing undergraduate business and business-related research

<http://pur.honorscollege.pitt.edu/>

*Pittsburg Undergraduate Review*—multidisciplinary journal

