Each April at Rutgers Camden, approximately 100 students and as many faculty and administrators crowd into the Multi-Purpose Room of the Campus Center for CURCA, or a Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievement. As with similar events on campuses across the country, they have come to engage, as presenters or viewers, an array of research posters representing our liberal arts programs. Some posters are slick and professional; others, crafted of construction paper and glue and mounted on a trifold, are noticeably hasty affairs. The students presenting their work beyond the course or independent study in which it was conducted range from excited to sheepish. For most students, CURCA is a first and often final opportunity as undergraduates to stand as experts in relation to others within an academic setting. Here, they are learning to inhabit the unfamiliar subject position of the undergraduate researcher.

For the relatively small percentage of students from the arts and the humanities who present at CURCA, the notion of research may seem out of place or even something of an “oxymoron” (DeVries, 2001). Indeed, it is often the students from majors such as English, philosophy, or history whose posters stand out as hasty affairs or, where carefully composed, still seem put together in richly idiosyncratic fashion. For them, it seems not entirely clear what constitutes research in this context and, thus, how best to represent a process of inquiry, analysis and argumentation that has led to this moment in a crowded hall, sandwiched between physics and psychology majors. Yet typically, presenters have received extensive mentoring on their projects now made ready for a public forum. In some cases, like their counterparts in the sciences and social sciences, they have even received modest grants or awards recognizing the scholarly merit of their research.

Perhaps it is that word “research” that presents unexpected stumbling blocks for these undergraduates, as it can for their faculty mentors. For many scholars in the humanities, the word “research” has a tinny ring, even as it is the coin of the realm. On the one hand, faculty engage in research, in the form of books, book chapters, and articles in peer reviewed journals, activities for which they seek research leaves and whose
contributions to an academic field are assessed for tenure and promotion. In doing so, they are productive in “research” in ways that are distinguishable from teaching and service. On the other hand, the term feels something like a jacket one borrows to eat at the club. Coming from a language spoken more by others than by one’s tribe, it prompts in some visions of lab coats and clipboards seemingly far afield from one’s concerns.

From our perspective, the work celebrated each year at Rutgers Camden’s CURCA reflects the “challenges and prospects” of undergraduate research in the humanities (Schantz, 2008, p. 26). Ten years after Dotterer observed that “Humanities departments have been the slowest to participate” in this “pedagogy of the twenty-first century,” an air of tentativeness still hangs about undergraduate search in the humanities (Dotterer, 2002, p. 81). We have witnessed at close range the anxieties faced by students and faculty mentors who wonder what counts as research and whether research forums such as CURCA are ideal spaces for students to show the fruits of their labor. A degree of poster-envy informs glances across the hall at the image-rich, attractively designed products of students in other disciplines, each documenting some experimental or investigational process. How different this work appears from the less methodical modes of criticism and analysis available to undergraduates in the humanities.

Even so, much has changed in the past decade or so, as measured by increasing rates of participation by students across all disciplines in poster fairs such as CURCA and in other venues for undergraduate research. Journals dedicated to undergraduate research continue to proliferate, some produced by universities to record the research activity of their students (e.g. ReCur: the Red Cedar Undergraduate Research Journal at Michigan State University; Inquiry: A Journal of Undergraduate Research at New York University), others more specialized, field-specific journals inviting submissions from undergraduates representing multiple institutions (e.g. Foundations: An Undergraduate Journal in History; Logos: The Cornell University Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy). These journals offer another, and perhaps more promising, path for undergraduates in the humanities to advance their research.

A case in point is Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Writing and Rhetoric. Since 2004, this journal, originally sponsored by Penn State Berks and now associated with the University Missouri - Kansas City, has emerged as a showcase for innovative scholarship (and mentoring) in the vibrant subfields of rhetoric, writing, and literacy within English Studies. Its very presence as a venue for motivated students to publicize their research efforts and develop collegial relations with undergraduate researchers elsewhere underscores the potential of undergraduate research as a prime pedagogical objective. As Grobman observes, “Undergraduate research in the humanities should not be limited to models that replicate undergraduate research in the sciences” (Grobman, 2007, p. 24). Humanities research is typically the work of individuals, rather than collaborators in team-based projects (Grobman, 2007). Furthermore, it is rare that students actually write with faculty mentors in the humanities, as opposed to writing alongside them in projects with varying degrees of overlap. The presence of disciplinary venues for scholarship by undergraduates is thus a promising development for bringing the humanities into the twenty-first century.

In this paper, we trace the development of an independent project of undergraduate research from incubating classroom to scholarly publication by a Rutgers Camden English major (Natalie) mentored by a teacher of rhetoric and writing studies (Bill). We explore here the conceptual and performative challenges of humanities research, mindful that institutional structures for mentoring undergraduate research and disciplinary conventions for representing research
complicate such ventures for students and faculty alike. Many have addressed these structures and conventions with calls for greater recognition and funding of undergraduate research (Boyer Commission, 1998; Rogers, 2003; McDorman, 2004) and new ways of valuing and understanding undergraduate research (Schantz, 2008). Here, we focus on an aspect of undergraduate research and mentoring that has received less attention—learning the genres of undergraduate research. We present a broad “arc” in order to capture two significant dimensions of undergraduate research: its nature as sponsored by individuals and institutions and its character as a genre of communication in authoritative forms such as academic poster and scholarly article.

What follows, then, is a doubled-sided account of the development of a seminar paper on human rights rhetoric into a published article responsive to the challenges and prospects of undergraduate research in the humanities. We conclude by asking how programs in the humanities might embrace opportunities for undergraduate research.

William FitzGerald, Assistant Professor of English at Rutgers Camden
Among my colleagues in English and the humanities broadly at Rutgers Camden, I have a reputation for being zealous in promoting undergraduate research. (My efforts recently resulted in an appointment as director of our center for teaching and learning.) This means, most visibly, that I encourage, or even require, students in my upper-level courses and all independent studies to present their research at our annual CURCA event, the benefits of which I routinely talk up in class. Indeed, I expect that students will develop projects that may be presented in the “protopublic space” of the campus research fair (Eberly, 1999). In this space, while still “on campus,” students step beyond the boundaries of the traditional classroom and one-to-one relationship of mentor and student to make their work visible. This can be a significant step in a student’s intellectual and professional development whether one moves on to graduate studies or not. For in this context, undergraduates gain experience composing the genres of the academy. In designing a poster and by orally presenting that poster, they discover that scholarship is accountable to a range of audiences and stakeholders. They learn, too, that this stage of the research process—in which one and one’s work is “on stage”—is integral to this process. This public phase is what makes research real.

At the same time, I recognize that my enthusiasm for “undergraduate research” is far from universal. Many of my colleagues in English and in other humanities departments do not actively seek out research opportunities for undergraduates that go beyond the learning outcomes of a course or classroom walls. In the vast majority of humanities courses at Rutgers Camden, it seems safe to say, undergraduates never conduct research that will be presented at CURCA. Most of our students do not take on the role of independent or collaborative researcher; at least, most do not advance a process of inquiry to the stage of public presentation. No doubt, many faculty and students do not see undergraduate scholarship as sufficiently rigorous or original to merit the level of investment demanded even of a proto-public forum like CURCA. The effort to ready projects seems disproportionate to the perceived benefits.

Perhaps a disciplinary formation in rhetoric and writing sets me apart from many of my peers in that I conceive of teachers at all levels as “sponsors of literacy” (Brandt, 1998). This term of literacy scholar Deborah Brandt’s refers to roles played by individuals and institutions in fostering (and withholding) literate practices of reading and writing in specific cultural and socioeconomic contexts. I approach mentoring of undergraduate and graduate research through this paradigm of literacy sponsorship by teaching students to write and to read the discourses of the academy, and beyond. I understand the various forms of academic research I sponsor as modes of literacy to which students must be introduced as well as led through in
developmental stages. These stages require that students practice appropriate moves of the genres in which we ask them to compose in addition to the methods of inquiry that constitute conducting research.

For me, undergraduate research is thus closely linked to pedagogical practices associated with “writing across the curriculum” and “writing in the disciplines.” Indeed, research in the humanities by undergraduates is hampered by relatively high barriers to entry to learn (and teach) the compositional moves marking these particular strands of academic literacy. Explicit identification of, let alone facility with, these moves comes relatively late, if it all, in one’s undergraduate career. Nonetheless, I believe that such moves can be learned.

This process became real for me in the spring of 2010, when I nominated a student for an undergraduate research award sponsored by the Chancellor’s Office. In this case, I identified as exemplary the work of a particularly independent-minded student, who, in my course, “Introduction to Writing Studies,” taught the previous fall, had engaged in innovative fieldwork bringing the academic study of genre to civic engagement as a volunteer tutor at a local center for community literacy. In a researched essay preceded by, as in most of my courses, a topic proposal memo, a brief literature review, and a formal in-class presentation to peers, my student was able to articulate the theoretical commitments of the literacy center’s work with neighborhood youth in their development as writers through the framework of genre. He also understood his own experience with academic genres of the researched essay; that is to say, he saw my mentoring of his research in parallel terms with his tutoring efforts in various expository and narrative modes of composing. My student (who was the only humanities major among three awardees) received a sizable monetary prize that spring, largely on my endorsement of the scholarly merits of his now completed project. To accept this award, he was expected to present his work at CURCA, even though he had little enthusiasm for turning his academic paper into a research poster.

Nonetheless, he did so, and in the process came to understand that, rough as his paper was in spots, it had potential—as I had been telling him—to speak to a wider community of scholars. He didn’t see himself as a scholar and while recognized by many of his professors as quite bright he was not especially passionate about literary criticism, the central focus of the English major.

Shortly after graduating, my student initiated steps toward the eventual publication of a greatly revised piece in the undergraduate research journal Young Scholars in Writing, thus becoming the first undergraduate student of mine to take his research beyond the classroom or campus center. What this process revealed to me was the extent to which the model of sponsorship examined and enacted in his project and in my mentoring of his project was both extensive and dynamic. I played a role, but so did other sponsoring agents, including the community literacy center where he conducted his ethnographic research. Beyond my own motivation as mentor to identify research worthy of recognition and of wider distribution, my home institution and a network of scholars associated with Young Scholars in Writing were also sponsors of literacy collaborating in a loose partnership. It seems important to note that my student did not move on to graduate school, but rather to internships and paid positions in professional writing with a local media outlet and a nationally distributed cable channel.

This occasion of developing a promising paper into a published article created a blueprint of sorts for a similar trajectory one year later when another undergraduate student (Natalie) would be nominated for and win recognition for her research, in this case for a project on human rights rhetoric in “Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Style.” This hybrid graduate-undergraduate course began with the expectation that all five undergraduates in the course would
undertake a substantial independent research project centered in stylistic analysis of non-literary texts and present their research both in class and at CURCA prior to submitting a final seminar paper. Midway through Spring 2012, I noted the ambitious preliminary work for “Universal Audiences as a Tool for Discourse: A Look into the Stylistic Effects of Hilary Clinton’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights Celebration Speech.” In nominating Natalie for a Dean’s Undergraduate Research Prize, I wrote:

Primarily, the research has significance for its intent to clarify how universal audience construction works in discourse addressed to polarized audiences. What special appeals and what stylistic decisions must be made in recognition of divided audiences in the context of universal principles? The particular value of the project is its sophisticated approach to working with primary texts, one an application of the other, through the use of critical methods drawn from a range of texts in rhetorical theory, all within a historically grounded approach to discourse. The application of stylistic analysis to the study of these texts and contexts represents an under-explored opportunity in rhetorical criticism to apply both “close” and contextual reading of texts.

In my nominating form, I underscored that Natalie was applying concepts encountered in two different courses in rhetoric, i.e., notions of audience and style as strategy, to analyze one text, a speech by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, in relation to its parent text, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Within several weeks, Natalie completed her research poster for CURCA and also her seminar paper, now retitled “The Stylistic Effects of Human Rights Rhetoric: A Comparison of Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's LGBT Speech and the Theory Behind the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (Midiri, 2012). The paper read unresolved conflicts over the nature of human rights in the Universal Declaration as providing for stylistic maneuvering by Secretary Clinton in addressing the thorny issue of LGBT rights on a global stage. Pursuing this inquiry required careful contextualizing of texts, skillful use of tools for analyzing their stylistic features, and sophisticated theorizing of rhetorical discourse. Given the many things done well in a project that remained undergraduate research, it made sense to recommend that Natalie submit her work to Young Scholars in Writing. Of course, I could now point to established precedent in the publication of Marc Hummel’s piece, just then appearing in Volume 9 of the journal (Hummel, 2011).

To be clear, I did not conclude that publication of student research in a national journal of undergraduate was what brought legitimacy to pedagogical practices in which I had long engaged, any more than participation in our campus CURCA event or the reception of prizes legitimated the effort to bring students to appropriate levels of research. In the courses in which these projects were initially conducted, all students similarly engaged in original, independent research, applying critical concepts from rhetoric or media studies to topics of personal interest. Indeed, I see opportunities for my students to engage in original research as forming a continuum from the most sheltered of in-class projects to the most public of efforts that open doors of opportunity for students to advance to a next stage in their professional lives.

Natalie Midiri, Class of 2013, Rutgers Camden
In the spring of 2012, I was lucky enough to take the hybrid undergraduate-graduate course, “Classical and Contemporary Approaches to Style.” This course was a significant departure from previous classes, for it was specifically designed to provide...
students with analytical methods applicable to research projects of our own. While I had certainly written many “research papers” in my English courses, the term “research” had a different connotation in this class. Materials in the style course served a dual function: to facilitate the development of research questions for individual projects and to provide systematic methods of analysis to address those questions. By contrast, the “research” in my previous classes was typically limited to digging up articles by real scholars to use as evidence, rather than performing my own analyses of texts.

My original assumption was that the marked contrast between my research experience in previous courses and in this course on style was symptomatic of the differences between graduate and undergraduate curricula. Since taking the style course, however, I have gone on to take other undergraduate courses that provide students with research methods and, consequently, promote original undergraduate research projects. Far from being “over the head” of average students, I have discovered that exposure to these methods is a welcome break from identifying major themes in a text, an assignment that sometimes stipulates against doing “outside” research.

In various English courses, aside from the personal teaching philosophy of the professor, an absence of methods and analytical tools is common. Work generated in undergraduate courses noticeably light on research methods rarely evolve into undergraduate research, even when projects fit the definition of research by offering an original perspective on a topic. Perhaps this is more a symptom of individual professor’s attitudes towards research rather than a clear delineation of what counts as undergraduate research.

Prior to the style course, I lamented the many emails I received from the English department calling for submission of creative works. Opportunities to publish fiction and poetry filled my inbox, but there were few calls for critical pieces, suggesting that the way to distinguish oneself as an English major is through creative, rather than critical, composition. This is unfortunate, since my unfulfilled desire, at that time, to generate work that lived beyond the classroom conflicted with my overall disinterest in creative writing. In fact, I was unaware my work even resembled real academic research until I was encouraged, in the style course, to present my work at CURCA. Thus, it was not only exposure to methods that helped me generate a research project, but also the encouragement to pursue opportunities I would not otherwise recognize or know about.

Many scholars committed to furthering undergraduate research have noted a tendency for humanities students to be characterized as illegitimate researchers incapable of little more than rehashing existing literature (Ede, 2004; Grobman, 2012; Howard, 2001; Ritter 2005). By contrast, students in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programs are typically considered apt for research, perhaps because large-scale research projects are more common in STEM fields, where a student workforce is critical to completing the components of an experiment, such as recording observations in the lab, interviewing research participants, and encoding data (Levenson, 2010). STEM research lends itself to collaboration, if for no other reason, because undergraduate researchers are needed to carry out experimental grunt work. However, research in the humanities tends toward the singular and the undergraduate is often unneeded, if not intrusive.

Grobman argues that undergraduate researchers must negotiate authority in the academic community (Grobman, 2012). Yet this can be problematic, since those who view undergraduate researchers as illegitimate control the means by which students learn to conduct research. In addition, research opportunities are often contingent on faculty recommendations to research fairs and undergraduate journals, so without faculty support (authorization) undergraduate
research rarely survives long enough to negotiate authority.

Complicating the relationship between undergraduate research in the humanities and authorization is the influence of STEM conventions on the research article, the primary mode of academic communication. Dating the origin of the research article to 1665 and the publication of *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, Swales argues that generic conventions of the research article are a direct consequence of the 17th century scientist’s need for experimental “witnesses” (Swales, 1990, p. 110). Technological obstacles, such as the absence of standardized tools for measurement, complicated the repeatability of an experiment – a significant issue since the efficacy of scientific experiments is based upon repeatability (Swales 1990, p. 111). In reaction to this technological problem, experimental witnesses—figures of authority within the scientific community—would assemble so that they could later articulate the research methodology used and thus testify to the experiment’s integrity (Swales 1990, p. 111). Those functions are now performed through peer review in assessing the methodologies articulated in research articles. In this way, the methodology section of a research article is as much a rhetorical act to receive authorization from the scientific community as it is a practical act to share knowledge (Swales 1990, p. 111).

In fact, many of the generic conventions associated with the research article are inherently rhetorical in nature and express a paradigm of negotiation for authorization. For example, Swales notes that references have evolved as a dominant feature interspersed throughout the research article “so that every stage of the document both relies on and relates to the work of others” (Swales, 1990, p. 115). Again, the occurrence of textual references is not merely for argumentation but is an act used to negotiate authority from the scientific community. Specifically, methodology citations, those citations that are used to connect a text to research methodologies previously established or discussed in existing literature, function in two ways: (1) they carve a niche within the discourse community for the research via association with texts that are already authorized and (2) they enhance the integrity of the research by describing the means to repeating an experiment for the virtual witnessing body (also a means of appealing for authorization).

Although a need for undergraduate researchers to make appeals for authorization in their work is vital and many of the conventions found in research articles (inherited from the sciences) do help the writer negotiate authorization from the academic community, there remains an inherent incompatibility between the sciences’ notion of methodology and the role of analytical methods in humanities undergraduate research. I have noted that many of the English courses I have taken spent little time imparting methods in the classroom that students can use to guide their research. Subsequently, the final research projects produced in such classes are absent the methods descriptions that generically distinguish a research article from work that is not considered research. This is not to say that work produced by undergraduates absent a systematic method of analysis does not constitute undergraduate research, but it certainly disadvantages their appeals for authority. Among these projects, it is common for the undergraduate to identify a theme or issue as of yet unrecognized in a text or topic of interest, often as a reaction to assignments intended to foster comprehension instead of analysis. However, though many undergraduates are given low stakes writing assignments to foster comprehension, it is quite possible for a fresh pair of eyes to unearth a new perspective on existing material, absent a method, even if that was not the instructor’s original intent for a given assignment.

Unfortunately, the research article is not the only site of struggle between the humanities and the research legacy they have inherited.
from the sciences. That other mode of dissemination, the research poster, is a source of just as much anxiety for undergraduate researchers as the article. I took readily to the research methods introduced in class in developing my project, but learning best practices of presenting and disseminating research through an academic poster was a surprising challenge. Turning a stylistic analysis of a human rights speech into something eye catching and engaging, something that could compete with the science displays with their vibrant photographs of experiments, scatter graphs, pie charts, etc. proved daunting.

According to Christie Fox, director of the honors program at Utah State University, my struggle to translate research from paper to poster is far from uncommon (Fox, 2010, p. 167). Fox notes that the poster presentation is a form traditionally associated with STEM and the social sciences, not the humanities. When a student in her program had the opportunity to present research on Shakespearian costume design at the National Collegiate Honors Conference (NCHC), she, too, strained to adapt her research to the “very science oriented” parameters of research poster design (Fox, 2010, p. 167).

While it is not accurate to say that the sciences totally shape genre conventions of the academic poster, it is true that the academic poster assumes conventions not present within or especially relevant to the humanities. From a rhetorical standpoint, it must also be noted that genre conventions of the academic poster are influenced by competition. Research fairs such as CURCA can feature as many as 100 posters, which must draw viewer’s attention if they are not to be overlooked. They also need to relate information quickly so viewers can absorb a project before moving on or lingering, perhaps, to engage the poster presenter. And from early on, research articles in the sciences relied on illustrations and subheadings to distance the relationship between researcher and findings and to promote the research’s integrity. Subheadings allow data to be separated from discussions of the data’s implications to make it seem like the data is uninfluenced by the researchers’ motivations, while graphs give the impression that data is related purely in mathematical terms, not in the researchers’ (potentially biased) words (Swales 1990, p. 115-116).

Since subheadings and graphics coincide with both of the major demands made on academic posters— that they be eye catching and quickly digestible— science research communicates quite well through academic posters. Images of all kinds (charts, graphs, photographs, etc.) can be represented on academic posters to draw viewers in and allow them to interact with the poster from afar so that a poster can have an audience of several people at one time. Similarly, subheadings allow viewers to retrieve information out of order even if their proximity to the poster or other viewers obscures their ability to perceive the whole at a glance and still make sense of a project’s narrative.

By contrast to these presentational norms, humanities research is not predisposed toward the eye catching and easily digestible. Although some fields in the humanities, such as linguistics, rely on quantitative data, others such as literary studies and philosophy depend almost exclusively on textual modes of analysis and argument. Unfortunately, text is not as quickly digested or as eye catching as visual information, especially when dense text is required to relate information. Furthermore, scholarly essays in the humanities are not so easily sectioned by subheadings that separate methodology from findings or findings from implications, so it can be difficult to narrate a humanities project through the fragmentation demanded by a poster’s viewers.

Fox notes that it took extensive drafting to translate that Shakespeare project into an academic poster, but that adapting the project to the structure of a scientific research report helped significantly (Fox, 2010, p. 167). However, the reality is that the academic poster so central to undergraduate research is
However, the reality is the academic poster so central to undergraduate research is just not suited to humanities research.

Carolyn R. Miller’s rhetorical account of genre in “Rhetorical Community: The Cultural Basis of Genre,” offers insights into my project’s comparatively poor showing at CURCA. (Miller, 1994, p. 72). Like Grobman, Miller argues that whenever a writer conforms to genre conventions, they are essentially engaged in a negotiation for authority with their audience (Miller, 1994, p. 72). As a consequence, genre conventions not only represent a rhetor’s purpose for participating in discourse through a particular genre, but also the demands made on individual participants within a discourse community. Miller’s understanding of genre as jointly determined by both the writer’s purpose (seeking authority) and the readership’s demands illustrates that my failure to create a poster that drew readers from the crowd had perhaps more to do with an inability to conform to research conventions than an inability rely on visual information.

Despite disappointment over my project’s reception at CURCA, I was encouraged to submit my paper for publication through Young Scholars in Writing (YSW). Without this encouragement, I probably would have abandoned the project due to frustrations over the poster version’s debut. However, I was surprised to find that the editing process offered by YSW helped me to revamp the project in just the ways necessary to improve a poster. My YSW editor helped me expand the project into a broader context so that my paper transitioned from a mere analysis of one speaking situation into a case study that has implications for the relationship between rhetorical style and policy debates broadly. Prior to YSW editing, my project was devoid of many of the generic moves necessary to negotiate interest and esteem from an academic audience, the same attention-getters absent from my poster. Post-editing, my paper was well situated within the political context surrounding my focus text; it presented research questions from a perspective that problematized existing scholarship on public policy debates and expanded on research findings to frame a discussion about the stylistic choices made in policy debates—all moves necessary to negotiating authority in academic writing that helped me to divide my project into categories commonly found on academic posters.

Fundamentally, my experience participating in undergraduate research in the classroom, at the local level, and nationally through YSW had much more to do with learning how to participate in scholarly communication than with my specific research project. What is significant about this to me is that, while I was quite ready to pursue my own research interests, I was not prepared for the communicative experience that is disseminating academic research and relied heavily on guidance from mentors like Bill and YSW editor Rachel Riedner to sustain my project beyond the boundaries of an end-of-semester paper. Thus, even through participating in undergraduate research and later becoming a researcher of undergraduate research has schooled me in many of the moves necessary for an author to negotiate authority in academic writing, my personal success has been contingent on the sponsorship I received from the
undergraduate research community. Without sponsorship, a probationary authorization granted by mentors in the academic community, I would have never had the opportunity to learn or practice any of the scholarly skills necessary to sustain my research.

**From Independent to Co-Researcher**

In approaching this essay as an opportunity to engage questions of undergraduate research in the humanities, we appreciated the irony that a model of independent undergraduate research, one in which most of the credit for sponsorship was owed to institutions beyond the faculty mentor (offices of deans and chancellors and editors and reviewers of journals), has pivoting toward models of academic co-research more common to the social sciences and STEM programs. This essay began as a meta-critical effort to understand the ways of undergraduate research in the humanities in the context of a course in media studies, “From Song to Cyberspace: Technologies of Communication,” taught by Bill and taken by Natalie.

This course became an opportunity to consider the process by which Natalie (and others) confront the genre expectations of communicating research. Natalie thus examined the various modes for representing research in order to understand how certain fields readily take to the visual grammar of the research poster, while other fields find this mode to be alienating. This is undergraduate research that Natalie presented in her media studies course. As one outcome of this course-sponsored research, Natalie also presented a research poster—comparing the genres of academic essay and research poster—to a special undergraduate poster session at CCC, the Conference on College Composition and Communication. A second outcome of this research is the opportunity to engage the research process in the humanities in a broader way as a co-researcher with Bill.

We believe that our joint experience with undergraduate research in rhetoric and writing studies as student and mentor demonstrates the potential to enter academic discourse communities even as undergraduates, not just as consumers of knowledge, but as contributors. We also realize that the experiences afforded Natalie and other undergraduates do not just happen because one is especially prepared and motivated. All undergraduate research is sponsored research made possible by networks of scholars and others within academic communities who provide the means for students to venture beyond classroom walls. We believe that one key move to allaying anxieties about the legitimacy and value of undergraduate research in the humanities is to recognize that the very same structures that work to support scholarship in general also support undergraduates through informal and formal presentation of work in various forums and through structures of editorial and peer review.

Finally, we submit that the greatest anxiety about undergraduate research in the humanities comes not from students, but from would-be mentors. This is the proverbial elephant in the room. Faculty in the humanities fear, often with justification, that time and energy devoted to undergraduate research distracts from their own research commitments. This is particularly the case for junior scholars meeting expectations for tenure and promotion. Absent incentives that reward mentoring, humanities faculty will hold back.

Yet this situation shows signs of positive change. An expanding emphasis on experiential learning and outcomes-based measures of assessment, focused on what students can do, holds much promise for reimagining the undergraduate classroom, lab, and studio as a site of discovery, not merely instruction. Indeed, there is reason to expect that as undergraduate research becomes firmly established as a primary curricular objective that models of inquiry and presentation appropriate to the humanities will gain broader currency. This development, we suggest, requires more flexible notions of research, the research poster and research
fair, as well as additional venues for presenting research achievements by undergraduates in print and online. We are encouraged by the opportunities for students to see their work move beyond the classroom, and even beyond their home campus, through journals such as Young Scholars in Writing and other sites that introduce undergraduates to the norms and culture of academic research.
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