

Reinventing the Journal?

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There has been no shortage of discussion surrounding *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research* since its launch in September 2007. For example, it raised a number of issues at an interactive symposium held at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference earlier this year (Lambert *et al.*, 2008) and prompted the government-backed Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) gateway to run a feature on undergraduate publishing (HERO Gateway, 2007).

In many ways this attention mirrors a wider shift towards enthusiasm for undergraduate publishing. For example, staff from the *Journal of Young Investigators* were invited to market their undergraduate journal alongside established publications at the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Annual Conference in February. Furthermore, the *McGill Journal of Medicine* recently won the right to be indexed by the Excerpta Medica Database (EMBASE), run by major academic publisher Elsevier.

There has also been a move by other organisations to launch undergraduate publications. For example, Oxford University Press launched its own undergraduate journal, *Bioscience Horizons*, last month (*Bioscience Horizons* Editorial Board, 2008). Similarly, the University of Central Lancashire expects to publish the first issue of its journal, *Diffusion*, later this year (Banks, 2008).

Alongside these developments, *Reinvention: a Journal of Undergraduate Research* continues as the largest undergraduate journal attracting contributors and readers from a range of intellectual disciplines. As a multi-disciplinary journal, *Reinvention* seeks to showcase the highest quality undergraduate research in a format of interest to a broad readership. Including articles from different perspectives emphasises the similarities and points of dialogue between disciplines, as well as the differences. In this current issue, Rebecca Funnell argues in 'Representations of Reality in a Court of Law' that each actor in court represents reality in a manner consistent with his or her own agenda. A similar theme resonates through Carole and Julie Biau's economic case study of Kenya in which interviewees sometimes gave contradictory answers. Indeed, we are reminded that such representations are influenced both by culture – see Harriet Gray's paper on 'Rape and Sexual Assault in Japan' – and historical context, as demonstrated in Jonathan Durham's creation and analysis of an index of women writers, and Fraser Joyce's article on 'Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century'. However, Nicholas Witham recognises in his analysis of Oliver Stone films that even our own understanding of history is at the mercy of context and interpretation by historians. Of course such contested realities are not unrelated to prejudice and frequently result in discrimination: whether against prostitutes in Victorian England, the poor in post-war Glasgow (Lauren Paice), or Gypsy traveller children in contemporary British schools, as highlighted by Danny Wilding's qualitative research. Although written by authors from a range of intellectual backgrounds, these articles are united by a common desire to challenge assumptions held about the world in which we live. This critical attitude towards dogma is doubtless a cornerstone of research, and of developing graduates capable of leading humanity into the 21st century.

However, editing a multi-disciplinary journal necessarily brings challenges. One of these is maintaining balance and it is certainly true that both issues to date have been dominated by papers from the arts and social sciences. This is perhaps inevitable given that these disciplines lend themselves to discursive analysis and review of existing literature; indeed, undergraduate research in the natural sciences often composes only part of a larger project led by an academic researcher. As a result, data may form only part of a paper over which undergraduate contributors have little or no ownership. The *Reinvention* editorial team continues to work with those in the natural sciences to understand the specific publication needs of undergraduate scientists.

The challenge of achieving balance is echoed in a wider discussion ongoing amongst those involved in undergraduate publishing. This discussion centres on the extent to which undergraduate journals, such as *Reinvention*, should be inclusive of all student work and fulfil a primarily pedagogical role in developing and improving undergraduate writing skills. According to one school of thought, undergraduate journals should exist to promote research to all students in order to encourage a spirit of natural enquiry and the capacity to think critically about the world around them. Indeed, this is broadly the aim of the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research, which seeks to 'integrate research-based learning into the undergraduate curriculum' and which funds the journal as part of its wider remit. However, recent discussions have raised the question of whether the journal exists to support an elite group of undergraduates or to provide an inclusive medium of knowledge development and sharing (Lambert *et al.*, 2008). For many commentators, then, the launch of *Reinvention* is an opportunity to reconsider and perhaps reinvent the traditional model of a scholarly journal. The argument that *Reinvention* should work towards an inclusive form of knowledge development is certainly persuasive. However, this view underestimates the value of the traditional model of academic publishing. For example, peer review introduces a valuable collaborative component into the publishing process. As stated in a previous editorial (Metcalfe, 2007), *Reinvention* reviewers are invited to provide more support to authors than might be required by a traditional academic journal. In this way, we hope that students learn from the publishing experience as well as contributing high-quality articles to the scholarly literature. Peer review also provides an opportunity to include students in the critical appraisal of manuscripts. Indeed, the editorial team are exploring the possibility of training undergraduates to work alongside faculty colleagues in conducting peer review. The journal, then, achieves inclusiveness by virtue of a supportive review process and student involvement throughout the publishing experience. Indeed, collaboration remains a significant feature and strength of the journal. We hope you enjoy the current issue.

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