

Dear readers,

Welcome to the Undergraduate Research Journal's Volume 17, Issue 1, *First, Further, Forward: Challenge the Now*. The URJ editorial team chose our theme to be "Challenge the Now" because across the submissions we received, the team was impressed by how much of the undergraduate research challenged what has been and is known in a range of disciplines. Here in this issue, we present research that pushes UC Merced first, further, and forward as we break boundaries and exceed expectations.

As the faculty advisor and instructor for the URJ, I had the privilege of supporting undergraduates—as researchers, authors, and editorial staff. These students managed all areas of the journal and worked with the authors whose research is published in this issue on revising their pieces for publication. What happened in this practicum course was reflexive learning, as the students and I taught each other as we became increasingly well versed in various particulars of promotion, web management, editing and layout. Without each other, and without the research, writing, and editorial passion of all people involved in this issue—students whose work we are publishing, faculty who have worked on research projects with undergraduates, and the visionary student-staff of the journal—we would not have this testament to scholarship and collaboration today. We are, indeed, challenging the now at a university whose aim is to move first, further, and forward.

Professor Susan Varnot

As I transition from my second semester with the URJ into my third, I reflect on the challenges I faced stepping into the role of Associate Editor. Balancing my URJ and non-URJ responsibilities was daunting, but I am proud of the progress we've made—particularly in promotional efforts and the rapport built with campus organizations. Next semester, I look forward to expanding the URJ's reach and streamlining workflows for future successors. My work in the URJ is not yet finished, but for now, I take pride in our growth and accomplishments.

Best,
Yu Fang Tseng
Managing Editor of Editorial Workflow

As lead copy-editor for UC Merced's Undergraduate Research Journal, I have made my fair attempt at steering the present team policy in a direction that will hopefully benefit all iterations of the team moving forward. For the sake of a consistent editing style, I created the URJ's Living House Style Guide that will serve as a foundation for this current editorial team and the future teams who will develop the style as they see fit. I also made some attempts to sow a reciprocal relationship between the URJ with UC Merced's Creative Arts Journal, The Vernal Pool, which will hopefully grow into something worthwhile soon.

Best,
Mitchell Bauer
Editorial Training Coordinator & Lead Copy Editor

I didn't know what to expect coming into the URJ and at first was afraid that I wouldn't be able to meet the standards of those that came before. Over the course of the semester, however, I had forgotten my initial fear as I began to get to know the people around me and settle into the roles I had been given. Though I wish I had taken more initiative early on in the semester and contributed more, I'm happy with my accomplishments. I made a comic strip that I hope can be used in the future as a silly little reference and have apparently kept track of the URJ emails pretty well. I look forward to joining again next semester, and whatever role I'm assigned I feel as though I'll be able to get the ball rolling a little faster next time.

Best,
Micah Angela Lardizabal
Art Director & Secretary

At first, when I started in the URJ, I felt clueless as to what I was supposed to be doing. My drive to succeed was far greater than my knowledge, but I was determined to face any challenge and learn as I did my role in the URJ. I learned how the process of reviewing and accepting works gets done; I'm learning what my role is in the showcase team and what my role is in this class. I couldn't have imagined that there would be so many hardworking and successful people in this class that have given me the stability and knowledge to succeed.

Best,

Kaisy Reynoso
Managing Editor of Campus Outreach & Events

My work as the Digital Director has been both simple and complex. The website provided unexpected limitations as did my responsibilities as a section editor. Both of which required me to learn unique solutions to the presented problems. The biggest lesson that appears time and time again is to do what you can with what you have. While I may not know everything or have every solution, I know that as a team we can overcome any challenge if we work together.

Best,
Zachary Gatto
Digital & Web Operations Director

My time in the URJ has been nothing short of spectacular. While reading the description of the course before signing up for it, I had thought that it would have been too much for me especially since I had no experience editing papers. I decided to stick with it and I am glad I did because it has been the best thing I ever went through with. With my role, I was able to add my creative ideas into the promotional side of the URJ. I have met amazing people and had the pleasure of working with them. I was given an opportunity to work with three amazing authors as well and they have made me a better editor. For anyone thinking this course is stressful, it is. Do not let it discourage you though; instead embrace the challenge as it will be very rewarding.

Best,
Jose Mondragon
Social Media & Publicity Manager

Being a member of the URJ was an honor and being an editor to the authors I've worked with so far has been a privilege. I'm grateful for the experiences I've had in the URJ, especially being a part of a team and working with authors. As someone who is usually reserved, having to communicate with too many people was challenging. However, the URJ has taught me to keep moving forward. If you want to be in the URJ but are scared

to make mistakes, just know that the lessons being learned are not the end of the world. Challenge yourself to keep going.

Best,
Genesis Iniguez-Espinoza
Humanities & Arts Section Editor and Treasurer

I am grateful for joining the URJ again and being a part of this amazing team. Being able to work with new people and familiar faces has been a pleasure. I am also thankful for having such a wonderful author to work with. The URJ gave me a reminder of all the opportunities the world has to give. I was able to learn so much about the editorial process and to be able to become proud of how far I've come. Facing these challenges gave me a reason to keep moving forward.

Best,
Analee Munoz Luna
Managing Editor of Multimedia

As for me, taking on the role as the Editor-in-Chief was my way of challenging the person I am today. It has been such a great privilege to work alongside my editorial team and authors to produce an exceptional undergraduate publication.

With each day that passes, new discoveries are being made, and with it, the chance to challenge what is already known. While this may ring true in the grand scheme of the world and the universe, I urge everyone to challenge their own limits and become the better version of yourself from yesterday.

In the URJ, I had the incredible opportunity to work with a driven team that motivates me to grow as the Editor-in-Chief. Initially, I never envisioned myself stepping into this position, but taking on this challenge has taught me valuable lessons in editorial processes and leadership.

I'd like to extend my thanks to the authors, to the editorial team, and to the readers for always challenging the now.

Best,
Emily Le
The Undergraduate Research Journal
Editor-in-Chief