

From the President

As CUR enters its third decade, it is a distinct honor and privilege for me to serve as CUR president and to write my first column in this capacity. First, I would like to thank past-president Kerry Karukstis and the 2007-2008 Executive Board for their tremendous work on behalf of CUR. As volunteers, Kerry and these board members have worked tirelessly for CUR, not only during this past year, but also for many years. These individuals, along with their predecessors and the enthusiastic and engaged membership of CUR, have helped bring our organization to a new level of excellence. I truly appreciate and value CUR's rich history and the "grassroots" dedication of CUR's members, and I feel honored to be entrusted with the stewardship of our organization for the next year.

The theme for this column is "Expanding CUR's Reach and Impact." It focuses on our continued efforts to collectively move the organization forward in realizing CUR's strategic aspirations and mission: *to support and promote high-quality undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research and scholarship*. The theme also reflects CUR's evolution as a professional organization and its representation of all disciplinary fields and institutional types. Highlights of several key milestones and initiatives for the coming year are outlined below.

New Division of Arts and Humanities. At CUR's 2008 annual business meeting, held at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota, the CUR Council approved the creation of our newest disciplinary-based division, the Division of Arts and Humanities. Whereas artists and humanists have been members of various disciplinary and interdisciplinary divisions of CUR for many years, increased interest in membership among the broader community, coupled with increased requests for programming and services in recent years, led a group of CUR members to submit a proposal to the Executive Board and Council to formally create this new division. On behalf of the Council and the membership, I would like to thank Naomi Yavneh, Iain Crawford, Laura Damuth, Andrew Harris, Joyce Kinkead, and Gregory Young for their hard work in preparing the formal proposal and for shepherding it through CUR's governance processes. This is an incredibly exciting milestone for CUR and one to be celebrated!

As a serendipitous capstone to the inauguration of the Division of Arts and Humanities, CUR's 2008 biennial national conference featured a fabulous plenary presentation by Jennifer Blackmer on undergraduate research in the arts, as well as many interesting workshops as part of the conference's Arts and Humanities program. You will also see expanded programming for these disciplines in coming months, including the focus of an upcoming issue of the *CUR Quarterly*, expanded Web-based dissemination of creative work, and a new scholarly volume, just to name a few.

If you are interested in joining the Division of Arts and Humanities, running for election to serve as a Councilor (nomination details/deadline posted later in this issue), or just sharing ideas for the new division, please contact Naomi Yavneh at yavneh@honors.usf.edu or the CUR National Office at cur@cur.org.

Advocacy. As you have read in previous columns, last year the CUR Council and Executive Board recognized that both internal and external factors necessitated changes for CUR's organizational structure if we are to remain at the forefront of the undergraduate research landscape. It was also recognized that CUR needs to expand the organization's sphere of influence with federal and state policymakers, with public and private funding agencies, with national media outlets for both higher education and scholarly research, and with key postsecondary education organizations that share our interest in undergraduate research. This enhanced visibility for CUR is essential to achieve our objectives in an increasingly challenging and unpredictable world. The frequency of calls for greater accountability, affordability, and transparency in higher education from a broad range of sources exemplify this climate. In fact, the same week that we were in Minnesota for CUR's 2008 business meeting and national conference, that state's system of 32 state colleges and universities unveiled a new Web-based "accountability dashboard."

As these calls for greater accountability continue to intensify, the powerful impacts of undergraduate research will position CUR members and member institutions to respond in a positive way. It is clear that engaged forms of learning, especially student involvement in research, scholarship, and creative activity, are transformational experiences for undergraduates,

and that this engagement yields an array of greater outcomes in comparison with those of students who are not as engaged.

To ensure that CUR is able to meet these challenges, Washington Partners, a Washington, DC-based firm, has been hired to help with our external advocacy efforts and to develop the internal capacity for CUR members to serve as more effective advocates. You will be hearing much more about these efforts, including ways in which you can get involved, as well as expanded programming for members. If you have specific suggestions, please send them to CUR's Government and External Relations Committee or to Nancy Hensel via the CUR National Office at cur@cur.org.

Broadening Participation in Undergraduate Research. CUR has been working for many years to broaden participation in undergraduate research in the most inclusive sense: among all disciplines and institution types, among students and faculty from underrepresented minority groups, among students at all levels of study, among students and faculty with disabilities, etc. The benefits for inclusive participation are numerous. For example, the educational gains from student engagement for those from traditionally underrepresented groups are even greater when compared to students from majority groups. Deep engagement in undergraduate research with a faculty mentor is positively correlated with improvement in student grades, critically important first-year to second-year retention rates, persistence to graduation, and motivation to pursue and succeed in graduate school. Involving underrepresented students in undergraduate research can benefit faculty in many ways as well. For example, students from underrepresented groups bring new and different perspectives and approaches to research questions, thereby providing opportunities to positively influence the direction of a scholarly or creative program.

Although much work remains ahead of us and this remains a strategic priority for CUR, terrific progress has been achieved in many areas. In particular, the focus of this issue of the *CUR Quarterly* is early experiences in undergraduate research.

Moreover, CUR's next book is titled *Broadening Participation in Undergraduate Research: Fostering Excellence and Enhancing the Impact*. This important volume, co-edited by CUR members Mary Boyd and Jodi Wesemann, is due to be published this fall, and you will be hearing much more about this book in the coming months.

I also want to briefly highlight two other examples of how CUR is working to inclusively broaden participation in undergraduate research, both of which you will be hearing more about in future columns. First, CUR has made terrific progress with our National Science Foundation-funded program of regional workshops. They are designed for institutions that do not have a tradition or culture of campus-wide engagement in undergraduate research. When the initial phase of the program is completed later this fall, 256 faculty and administrators from 64 institutions will have participated in the workshops, and each of these institutions will benefit from a robust series of follow-up activities designed to ensure sustainability of undergraduate research and a community of scholars on their campuses. Second, the CUR Executive Board recently approved an expanded model for institutional memberships, which will provide institutional members with value-added benefits to dramatically broaden participation on their campuses. The CUR National Office is finalizing the details of this new plan, and it will be phased in as another membership option during the coming year.

These are just a few examples of the many exciting strategic initiatives that CUR has under way. I look forward to working with you to "expand CUR's reach and impact" as we take our organization to an even higher level of distinction and excellence.

Best wishes for a productive and enjoyable 2008-2009 year.


Jeffrey M. Osborn
CUR President

