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From the Editor

What can student research do? This is one question that, collectively, the four essays in this issue of *Stylus* set out to answer. Limited in resources, pressed for time, unsure of their standing in relation to the rest of the University, many students—perhaps even you—wonder whether or not they can make a meaningful contribution to an existing research conversation. The scholarly articles they read to provide background for their research appear dense and esoteric, the terms of debate often fuzzy. Collecting primary research—through interviews, surveys, experiments, or a variety of other methods—seems like an impossible hurdle to overcome. And, even after the students understand the existing research, then come up with their own research methods that will help them look into some unanswered question or questions, and then actually conduct that research, they still have to figure out some way of presenting this information—often in a paper that’s bigger than anything they’ve ever written before. It hardly seems feasible.

I suspect that the four student writers published in this issue encountered these same doubts along the way to conducting and completing their own research projects, parts of which appear in the following pages. I suspect that you, too, have encountered such doubts or uncertainties, and maybe you are even experiencing them right now. These worries are not unique to students; I think they are, instead, part of the research experience we all go through. But what if we turned these worries on their head? Rather than be paralyzed by these fears, self-doubts, and uncertainties, what if we embraced them? Instead of being put off by the enormity of the task before us, what if we reveled in it?

Conducting genuine research presents a number of challenges. It is hard. But, in focusing on the difficulties, I think we often overlook the opportunity that research presents: we have a chance to make a real contribution to knowledge, to say something that’s never been said, to think something that’s never been thought. That’s huge. It requires creativity and inquisitiveness, but it’s possible, and I think the following essays prove it.

In her essay, “Writing with Four Senses: A Hearing Impaired Person’s Writing,” Lauren Perry takes on the difficult task of analyzing herself and her writing. After first doing some background research on how hearing impairment affects the development of writing ability, Perry sets out to conduct research that hasn’t ever been done: she does an extensive case study on one writer—herself. By blending careful analysis with insights that only she could have had about her own writing, she comes to some surprising conclusions.

The next piece is a review of literature for Ellen Cecil's "What Interests Students in Recreational Reading?" After reading it, you might be asking yourself, "Where's the rest of the essay?" We thought Cecil's use of secondary research was worth shining a spotlight on. Her review of literature is an excellent example of a student taking control of her research rather than letting the research take control of her. Getting into these scholarly conversations is difficult, but Cecil shows us that it can be done. Pay special attention to how she blends points from different authors to begin carving out her own space in the conversation.

Next up is Justin Immerman's "Becoming a Writer in the World: A Student's Perspective on Creativity and Literacy Instruction." Like Perry, Immerman follows up some background research with his own data collection, this time in the form of a focus group. His focus group is quite blunt in stating some of their feelings about the role creativity plays in the writing classroom, and Immerman's analysis and discussion are detailed and interesting. His research has implications for writing teachers at all levels. You might find it helpful to consider the different strategies Perry and Immerman employ in conducting and then presenting their research. Both are effective, so looking at them together might open your eyes to some of the different choices available when you're working on your own research projects.

We end on a piece that looks a little different than the others. Alex Koenig's "Discovering My Niche: How I Found Inspiration in My Literacy Sponsors" may not look like the typical research essay, but I urge you to consider how the depth of Koenig's self-reflections act as their own kind of research. Koenig's narrative is an interesting one, and I think many readers will enjoy following his line of thought as he traces the influences that have led to his current understanding of writing and literacy.

So, to end with the question we started with, what can student research do? If these four essays are any indication, and I think they are, the answer is, "A lot."

-Matt Bryan