

In early November 2005, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) released the first report from its Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) campaign—*Liberal Education Outcomes: A Preliminary Report on Student Achievement in College*. As this report states, “For liberal education outcomes, evidence should vividly depict the rich and complex nature of student accomplishment as knowledge and skills are built over time and across disciplines.” Undergraduate research, the theme of this issue of *Peer Review*, is a promising educational innovation from which college leaders might draw evidence of achievement of the more sophisticated learning outcomes we now seek for today's students.

While working on this issue, I had the opportunity to reflect upon my own undergraduate research project that I undertook with the guidance of a three-member faculty committee during my last year as a student at Hampshire College, a member of the Greater Expectations Consortium on Quality Education. Since its inception in 1970, Hampshire has required all students to design, implement, and complete an undergraduate research project prior to graduation. Known at Hampshire as the Division III project, this independent study project must deal with a complex set of questions, concepts, skills, and abilities. My Division III project focused on the development of a prospectus for and prototype of a periodical magazine for African American adolescent females. No publication for that audience existed at that time.

The initial phase of my project involved researching and reviewing the magazines that had been published specifically for African American audiences. This task required me to spend several hours combing the special magazine collections at the Library of Congress. At the same time, I studied the periodicals that were published for young women at that time and I measured the presence of African American women in those magazines. After establishing a historical and a marketing perspective for this project, I designed a simple survey instrument to administer to black adolescent women in Washington, DC, Baltimore, and Springfield, Massachusetts. I found that initiative and persistence were key attributes needed to complete my research. One of the most challenging aspects of the entire project was locating willing participants for the test groups. I administered the survey to girls in a

host of situations, from Girl Scout meetings to an ad hoc focus group that was pulled together when, out of desperation due of an approaching deadline, I was compelled to go without an appointment into a middle school and ask the principal if I could meet with a few of his students for my research.

In the concluding stage of my project, I analyzed the information that I collected and wrote a prospectus for the proposed magazine, which I modeled after plans used for similar established publications. Finally, I created sample articles and graphics for my proposed publication—a magazine that I titled *New Horizons*—based on all of the information obtained during my research. After six months of dedicated time and effort to complete my project, I met with my committee and presented and successfully defended my Division III thesis paper and supporting materials. The completion of this project was a true capstone to my undergraduate academic career. With my committee's support and through my research efforts, I gained a sense of accomplishment and an appreciation for the process of academic discovery. I also finished with the knowledge that through concentrated planning and effort I could actualize my visions.

My lessons learned from that project were many and far reaching—ultimately, my undergraduate research experience greatly influenced my career choice. After many years of working in the field of educational periodical publishing—including a few magazine launches—I credit my independent study experience with situating me on this path of inquiry and creativity. While not all students will discover their life's calling through undergraduate research, participation in such programs is certain to bring them new insights that will help them to define their passions and will contribute to their intellectual growth.

—SHELLEY JOHNSON CAREY

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