

Dear Reader,

I hope that this letter finds you healthy, safe, and well. Thank you for your support of the Minnesota Undergraduate Research & Academic Journal (MURAJ). I am delighted to share a collection of outstanding undergraduate research in our third annual issue. At MURAJ, undergraduate students are at the core of all we do: authoring manuscripts, contributing reviews, leading the publication. As an open-access peer-review journal with nonexclusive copyright, we are committed to the principle that knowledge is best when it is shared.

Amidst these uncertain times, I am heartened when I look at the work of everyone involved in this publication. The authors and reviewers have demonstrated grace and resilience as they delivered deeply thoughtful writing and reviews. When thinking about research, it can be tempting to remove the human researcher from the picture. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum, though. Everyone involved in this journal brings their own perspective to the field, the lab, the library. We also wear many hats in addition to that of researcher: student, caregiver, worker, family member, volunteer, community member. The recent months have, in some form, deepened and complicated the demands placed on everyone in the University community. In the face of these increased demands, the authors, reviewers, and editors chose to continue their work with this journal. I recognize that them making such a choice is neither trivial or easy, and I am sincerely grateful to each of them.

Regardless of discipline or school of thought, research activities are united by a spirit of curiosity. To quote writer Zora Neale Hurston, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is speaking and prodding with a purpose.” We need purposeful curiosity. As we grapple with a pandemic and reckon with systemic racism - including within academia - there is so much work still to be done. We must be intentional and critically reflective on how we use our platforms in publishing to elevate research. We need purposeful curiosity, and we need purposeful publishing. As my term as Editor-in-Chief concludes, I present a charge to the journal: in the coming academic year, implement a formal commitment for supporting and elevating community-oriented research on issues of social and racial justice. Building an environment where all students feel safe, supported, and seen is our work, too. Knowledge is not created in a vacuum.

I first became involved with MURAJ within my first week of my first semester on campus, before MURAJ had a name. To see the journal grow and flourish into a uniquely multidisciplinary platform for undergraduate research has been one of the highlights of my undergraduate career. Having graduated last month, I present this issue of MURAJ with immense gratitude to everyone who has helped in the journal’s development and continued success.

Thank you, and stay purposefully curious.

Sincerely,



Austin Kraft
MURAJ Editor-in-Chief, 2019-2020