

Williams Undergraduate Research Journal: Expanding Access to Publication Opportunities for Underrepresented Communities in Academia

Project Outline:

Williams Undergraduate Research Journal (WURJ) is Williams' first (and only) interdisciplinary research journal publishing student work in the hard sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and humanities. Through its yearly publication, WURJ aims to help prepare members of the student body for graduate school, academia, or other research oriented careers by introducing them to the academic peer review process and providing a platform to share original work from classes, independent studies, research assistant positions, and thesis projects. WURJ is committed to increasing diversity in academia, and through outreach and collaboration with groups like OURSTEM+, we hope to increase the representation of racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, and gender minorities in academic publishing.

Rationale:

Publishing in a peer-reviewed journal as an undergraduate is one of the most effective ways to enhance applications for law school, medical school, and graduate school, showing admissions committees that applicants have the field specific knowledge, academic writing skills, and perseverance necessary to succeed in post tertiary education. Likewise, the editing and peer-review process can be extremely beneficial for young scholars, providing them with feedback to improve their writing and research skills. Unfortunately, access to publication opportunities for undergraduates is extremely limited, due in part to the exorbitant submission fees and strict requirements characteristic of most journals. Consequently, many students are only able to publish in academic journals through individual or family connections to professors, scientists, or other researchers, perpetuating pre-existing power structures and contributing to severe inequity in academia.

A large proportion of Williams students conduct original research as part of class projects, independent studies, research assistant positions, or theses. The vast majority of these projects merely culminate in a grade, or sometimes a poster presentation, meaning that there is a pre-existing wealth of research and review articles that could be used to help students learn about academic writing and further their professional ambitions. Since the majority of this research is

too narrow in scope to be published in most professional academic journals, by providing a platform for publishing research and review articles written by Williams students, WURJ aims to reduce inequity and increase accessibility in academic publishing. Likewise, through outreach and collaborations with student groups seeking to expand diversity in specific academic disciplines (such as OURSTEM+), we plan to amplify minority voices by helping these students adapt their work for publication.

Target audience:

Williams students from racial, ethnic, sexual, economic, and gender minorities in academia who have an interest in research, plan to go into academia, or want to prepare for graduate school. We especially want to encourage submissions of work in the social sciences and humanities due to the additional barriers faced by students attempting to publish in these areas.

Project Sustainability:

While we do intend to publish copies of WURJ in print so that the journal can reach the widest audience possible and all the students involved can have a physical record of their work, we are particularly interested in expanding our online presence to increase readership and accessibility. Our current website is in a state of disarray, and cannot be accessed without the URL, so the 75 hours of student graphic and web design work requested will go a long way in developing our website. Once we have a functional website where we can edit the text and upload the journal, we don't anticipate needing any major design changes for at least the next few years. Due to the transient nature of academic publishing, unless we move to an entirely web-based platform, we anticipate publishing 100-200 copies of the journal in print every year. While this is less than ideal from a conservation standpoint, we hope that the accessibility and legitimacy benefits conferred by publishing in print will outweigh the environmental cost.