

Royal Road:
A Journal of Undergraduate Research

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EDITORS

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Royal Road features the best researched arguments produced in the University of Tampa's AWR 201: Academic Writing and Research course. Student essays are nominated by instructors and reviewed by a faculty panel; those that are selected for potential publication undergo a process of peer review and revision that reflect the standards of academic publishing. Selected essays are published annually and used as models for future sections of AWR 201.

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Editor's Introduction

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”

—Karl Marx, *Preface to the 1872 French edition of Das Kapital*.

Not unlike a fine research project, the idea for Royal Road began with a serendipitous conversation. In early fall of 2014, I stopped by Daniel Dooghan’s office to ask how his classes were going, and more particularly, how he felt about the recent curricular change that moved FYW 102 from a first-year to a second-year course (AWR 201). Dan was excited about it, and hopeful that by moving the course into the second year students would benefit from greater intellectual maturity and more ambitious research. For me, such enthusiasm is always contagious, and by the end of that brief meeting we had convinced each other that we needed a way to showcase the great research projects that would be coming out of the new 201 classes. By the next spring we had enlisted the help of our colleague David Reamer and put together a proposal for a UT Learning Enrichment Grant. We got that grant, and have been working steadily on the project ever since. Thus, from a brief, wholly unpremeditated conversation—a wayside stop in the middle of a busy day—this journal has emerged.

I often use the analogy of a conversation when I teach my students about the ways that research furthers knowledge, but conversation can also inspire projects in the most unpredictable ways. Having said that, I must admit that the enthusiastic conversation that prompted Royal Road was unusual. As a general rule, when writing teachers get together they commiserate over weak student performances, or lament the lack of student preparation for class or the uninspired responses on a recent essay. Such conversations, while negative on the surface, really belie a much deeper concern. When teachers commiserate, the conversations become a kind of scarring process, a way of helping to

close the deeper wound of failing to reach and inspire our students. Put another way, writing teachers aren't pessimistic; they are, instead, frustrated optimists who survive personal disappointments—the lectures that fall flat, the assignments that go awry, the failures with students—by clinging to memories of individual success stories. It can be a thin gruel. Teaching academic writing is one of the most labor-intensive and thankless jobs in a university. But hope abides, and for instructors, each semester holds out the possibility that a new group of students might reach “luminous summits” under their tutelage.

This issue of *Royal Road* is dedicated to the academic writing teachers at the University of Tampa. We hope that the marvelous work that appears in this volume, and in future ones, will highlight the brilliance that appears every year in our classes but goes unrecognized, or, worse still, is forgotten. Furthermore, our hope is that these student essays will serve as rich and sustaining reminders of what is achieved when excellent teachers serendipitously encounter talented and hard-working students. These are indeed rare achievements. Over 1,400 students took AWR 201 in the 2015-2016 academic year, and the best essays from over 70 sections were considered for review. After months of rigorous vetting and revision, the seven student essays that remain are truly exceptional examples of what is valued in the AWR program. Of course, the student authors are in every way remarkable, and celebrating them was also a goal of this project. As our faculty know well, AWR courses can be a point of origin for lifelong academic and intellectual pursuits. But it takes a special teacher to identify and cultivate such early promise, and we wish to extend special thanks to the faculty members who nominated their students' work and then also graciously agreed to mentor the authors through the publication process. Dr. Daniel Dooghan, Dr. Caroline Hovanec, Dr. Richard Mathews, Dr. David Reamer, and Dr. Daniel Wollenberg are not simply fine teachers of academic writing; they are committed scholars who are, in turn, devoted to the intellectual life of the university. That devotion shines through every aspect of their students' work.

Undoubtedly, the challenge of learning to become a better

writer is a difficult one, but that is precisely what the authors of this first volume have accomplished. Their work in the AWR classroom was outstanding, but all of them rose above that, continuing to work on their projects, responding to readers' reports, making stylistic revisions, and patiently enduring the publication process. The essays that follow reflect a broad range of academic interests but they also all manage to address timely and important issues in our culture. In other words, they are works of genuine academic and social engagement. The first two essays, in particular, from Kayleigh Ross and Robert Pantano, pointedly call for action. Kayleigh's article thoughtfully considers the questions surrounding an adolescent's right to refuse health care, while Robert's questions the value of standardized testing and its impact upon education. Both are fine examples of the role of academic research in policy change, something desperately needed in this era of manufactured "white papers."

We are also proud to say that this volume includes a number of articles that interrogate issues of gender discrimination and antifeminist violence. Carla Shapiro's essay, "Let Women Fight," eloquently argues for gender equality in the US military by considering the issues of women in combat. Greg Browne takes an alternate approach by offering an inventive and fascinating perspective on "femicide" in Mexico. His essay documents the blatantly misogynistic culture that permitted serial murders of female factory workers in Ciudad Juarez, and then analyzes their relation to the fictional work of Roberto Bolaño. Finally, Kaitlyn Stockdale provides historical perspective on women's issues by examining the role of female "hysteria" in utopic novels by Edward Bellamy and William Morris. While Bellamy and Morris posit limited solutions to the claustrophobic situation of women in the late nineteenth century, their positions are contrasted with the stark reality presented by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's famous story "The Yellow Wallpaper." What stands out among all of these essays is a consistent call to reconsider the ways that gender assumptions have framed and continue to frame the cultures that we live in.

Emily Murphy also takes up the problem of ideology through an analysis of contemporary zombie films. She argues

that older zombie films function as vehicles for social commentary on race, but also suggests that, more recently, the zombie film genre has become an unstable signifier, one that is fusing with other forms, like romantic comedy. Lastly, Michelle Geoffro examines the formative significance of parenting and its importance for a future generation. By examining a number of the most common parenting styles, she argues for a model that blends the most successful aspects of each, ultimately suggesting that a balanced approach leads to healthy, happy, and productive children.

A final word about the journal's title. The term Royal Road refers to an ancient Persian trade route linked with the Silk Road, connecting East and West. It dates back at least as far as the fifth century BCE, and pieces of the road are still in existence. The Greek historian Herodotus celebrated the Royal Road as a remarkable feat of engineering, one that enabled tremendous speed and ease of travel for couriers. As historical allusion, the Royal Road certainly represents an ideal of cultural connection that we always hope for in our program; moreover, it suggests an exchange of ideas that is another kind of ideal, a way of representing the possibilities afforded by interdisciplinary thinking. But what we really had in mind when we chose Royal Road for our title was the metaphorical irony that the epigraph from Karl Marx suggests. There is no Royal Road to writing a great research essay, and there is no Royal Road to teaching that process either. Nevertheless, as this volume so wonderfully illuminates, the desire to learn finds a path through even the most obscure and dark forests.

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