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An interview with faculty sponsor Jonette Lancos

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An interview with faculty sponsor Jonette Lancos

Nicole Callahan

What does undergraduate research mean to you?

I started mentoring students on paper presentations, when GREAT Day wasn't GREAT Day, it was part of the Humanities Undergraduate Symposium. It was at night and the philosophy department put it on. Paper writers from the dance history class learn how to do scholarly writing and research, and we would put those forth to a panel and a moderator. Some of the ideas from that continued, so when GREAT Day started I was like, "Oh, well we've been doing that for a long time." I actually have some of those papers still. It was very interesting. I had a student, Shara Willson, who was an English major, and she participated in the Humanities Undergraduate Symposium, and she's gone on to do her doctorate, and she now teaches in a college and is a dean. So, I've been doing undergraduate research for quite a while. For me, it's a way that students become inspired by the content of a course, and then they learn to write and present about it.

What impact does undergraduate research have on Geneseo culture and on higher education in general?

The research is significant, because it helps to prepare the many that are going on to a graduate program. So it prepares them to write or to do a presentation. To prepare for the next step in their life. At Geneseo there are so many students that take ideas and they bring one idea, like dance scholarship, into their major. I think that's what's so good as a liberal arts college, that students are able to pull from all of the liberal arts and the arts, to understand the importance of scholarship. Students at GREAT Day have their colleagues come and witness their work, and being able to witness the extraordinary achievements of other students is key as to why Geneseo is such a prominent college. The faculty also really collaborate with students, in labs, in art, and so on, and involve them in collaborative projects. That's why I think GREAT Day is wonderful. We've also had students go on to participate in the American College Dance Conference, where dancers will present their creative work based on scholarly work.

What characteristics about the poster/presentation you believe would make the poster/presentation successful? OR What made you recommend the presentation you did?

Samantha Schmeer presented her paper at the oral report, and I said, “you have to present this at GREAT Day; it’s wonderful.” It talked about being careful not to appropriate indigenous cultures, and I thought it was such a valid paper in relation to how we live our life and how we think about people other than ourselves. I enjoy seeing how they take that small idea and develop it. When she presented it at GREAT Day she had developed it, and it was just an amazing presentation. She used some of the articles I talked about in ,ssalcit made such an impact on her that she wrote this amazing and passionate essay about being very careful not to appropriate Native people’s works for your own. I think that was inspiring to hear people in at GREAT Day to hear her speak. Then she made a dance called *Harbingers* about the breakdown of the earth, and that was inspired by the Native American phrase, “When one tree is gone, it’s not ever going to be again.” So she feels very strongly about those important social ideas, so that was part of that paper, which then continued into a creative project. I see her carrying this idea forward, I think it’s an important part of her philosophy.

Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.

What I do is to suggest that they apply to present at GREAT Day. Then, they present the paper outside class and I give them suggestions on how to present the paper, what kind of visual ideas they’re going to have. It’s not always good to have a PowerPoint with all the text, because then it’s like, “Well why am I listening to the presentation?” I made suggestions to her about speaking, diction, dynamics of vocal capacity. It’s a frightening thing, to a certain extent, because your friends show up and so on, so I try to give them the confidence they need for presenting. I acknowledge that they’re on the right track and assure them their paper will be well received. My role as a mentor is to make them feel confident, and when it comes time to do the presentation they blossom.