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An interview with faculty advisor Jennifer Katz

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An interview with faculty advisor Jennifer Katz

Nicole Callahan

What does undergraduate research mean to you?

Well it means a lot. When I was an undergraduate, I got involved in research and it changed my life. So, to me, it feels like an opportunity to change somebody's life in that same way. I thought it was amazing to move from a consumer of information to a producer of information. I was enthralled, and it made me decide to go into an academic career. I don't feel like everybody who works with me has to go into an academic career, but I want them to know about the magic of research and have the option and the skills to do it. Also, in terms of what it means to me now, it means a chance to work closely with really wonderful students, to learn from them and teach them all at the same time. So, it's one of the very best parts of my job.

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

I do see it impact Geneseo culture, the fact that undergraduate research is a priority for the whole campus is amazing. The way I got involved in undergraduate research was that it was a specific course offering, of a specific type, that I was required to have. So, I did choose it but I didn't really know what I was choosing. I just knew it fit with my schedule. Students at Geneseo, even from the beginning hear about research, know about research, and it's just a part of the academic experience not just to be a consumer but a producer. I'm envious of students at this wonderful school that get to be a part of that culture. I got to be a part of undergraduate research but it was lucky, here it's not a question of luck.

What characteristics of the students' presentation made you recommend their research?

I think it was really exciting, because we did the whole thing. We came up with an idea, a way to test the idea, we collected the data, we analyzed the data, and then we could answer our question. We did the whole thing and it took a long time, it took several semesters, and we were excited to share our findings, and I was like "This is another chance to share it again!" Let's do that.

Describe your mentorship role in the project

I think that I can be a little controlling, and I can lack creativity. I think that makes me a good faculty mentor because I need student input for creativity and then I provide the structure, possibly too much structure, but they're good at telling me how things are. So, my basic tendencies are to be controlling and structured, but that varies based on need. In this instance we're talking about fully capable, autonomous students who were highly ethical. If they said they were going to do something, it got done. So, all the way through we shared the work, the grunt work and the high-level work, and I am very grateful to have wonderful students like Claire and Tess. There are so many students like that at Geneseo. Every semester I wish I had Hermione's time turner, I wish I had more time. There's not enough time and space for how many wonderful students there are, and Claire and Tess are some of the best.