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Front Matter

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Catalyst

A Multidisciplinary Review of Undergraduate Scholarship

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Cover: "A Primary Mother," by Kathleen B. Fullilove. Owned privately by the artist's mother in Mandeville, La.

The mission of *Catalyst* is to give our fellow undergraduates the desire and tools to take the knowledge acquired in the classroom to a new level. That level is what we call undergraduate research. It means using your knowledge in a new way. Undergraduate research can involve experience, travel, creative work, service learning, laboratory discovery, and traditional library research.

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The Undergraduate Research Initiative (URI) was founded through student initiative in November of 1999. This Student Government Association special task force sought to incorporate undergraduate research into all Southern Miss programs. Using improvement suggestions provided by the Boyer Commission, URI began to research ways in which the USM could make research-based learning the standard; remove barriers to interdisciplinary education; use information technology creatively; and cultivate a sense of community to improve education.

With these ideas in mind, URI began to construct a cornerstone project that would be called *Catalyst*. This project would combine an interdisciplinary approach with a broad definition of research, and help stimulate dialog between faculty and students. Through this project, URI hopes to provide every interested undergraduate with the opportunity to participate in some form of hands-on research.

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Catalyst: A Multidisciplinary Review of Undergraduate Scholarship, has been generously funded by the Office of the Vice President for Research, the Office for the Vice President for Student Affairs, and The University of Southern Mississippi Student Government Association. The staff of *Catalyst* wishes to extend its gratitude to these organizations.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It is difficult to communicate in fewer than 500 words the initiative, the mission, and the hopes for this project. I never dreamed that this review could have generated the support and interest that it has. So many people and so many hours of work have combined to form these 36 pages. First and foremost, I would like to thank all of the faculty, staff, students, and friends who have assisted in the creation of this issue.

Catalyst has its roots in the Undergraduate Research Initiative (URI), an organization founded in 1999 as a Student Government Association Special Task Force. The goal of URI is to improve opportunities for undergraduate research on the campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. URI provides the foundation and the springboard for this project.

URI emphasizes a broad definition of the word "research." We interpret the word to mean more than traditional library or laboratory research. Research means learning by action, creation, and experience. This allows us to incorporate many styles of research as well as the many varieties of experiential learning, including study-abroad, service-learning, internships, and co-ops.

In September 2001, URI presented an idea to our sponsors, Dr. Joseph Paul and Dr. Donald Cotten, for an undergraduate research journal for USM. The goal was to demonstrate the quality of undergraduate research and experiential learning opportunities that exist at our university by showcasing exceptional student work. Along with this, we hoped that the project would thus inspire other undergraduates to pursue similar opportunities. This double-sided effect inspired the title *Catalyst*, with the hopes that by exhibiting exceptional undergraduate work, we could help and guide others toward reaching their potential.

One year after the idea was born, we are proud to present our first issue. *Catalyst: A Multidisciplinary Review of Undergraduate Scholarship* will also be unique in its multidisciplinary approach. We hope to retain the integrity of each article, while making them accessible even to those not in the field. True experiential learning requires an interdisciplinary approach and *Catalyst* reflects this idea. We will see perspectives on teaching from an art educator and an English educator. We will see how a student of music history differs in perspective from a composer. More than anything else in this issue, innovation and creativity resonate as the primary values that motivate the acquisition of knowledge. Whether conducting a science experiment in zero gravity, working with children in a garden, or creating a truly original work of art, a student must use skills learned in every subject, as well as some not confined to the classroom.

The student writers included in this journal have gone beyond the learning required to earn their degrees; they went further to create new knowledge for their own minds and others. Here, they share their thoughts and experiences with you in the hopes that, not only will you learn something, but also, you will use your own knowledge in new ways. If you are a faculty member, I hope you will share these experiences and opportunities with your students. If you are a student, I challenge you to seek more from your education, and pursue learning in and outside of the classroom.

Enjoy this first issue of *Catalyst*!

Jessica Lynn Neno

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