A LOOK BACK FROM TWO YOUNG SCHOLARS

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When the premier issue of *Young Scholars in Writing* published our essay, “When Peer Tutors Write about Writing: Literacy Narratives and Self Reflection,” we embraced the words of editors Laurie Grobman and the late Candace Spigelman, who declared that “just as students’ voices are crucial to the work of composition and rhetoric, student research may significantly contribute to the scholarship, learning, and on-going formation of this disciplinary community” (5). However, we harbored no expectations that our voices would actually be heard. We were just undergraduates—what did we know? Who would listen to us?

Not only were we heard, but our work was taken seriously enough to be engaged by those within the scholarly community. In the January 2006 issue of *College English*, Amy E. Robillard cites and references both the journal and our essay. Robillard indicates the importance of and need for undergraduate voices within composition and rhetoric scholarship. Her use of our words shows us the value of our young voices to the composition and rhetoric community and also inspires us to hear the voices of other young scholars.

Before its publication and citation, our essay was the product of several other academic endeavors at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. As undergraduates, we both served as writing associates (WAs) for the College Writing Program. At the beginning of each academic year, WAs are required to compose literacy narratives, a component of training and orientation that asks the WAs to reflect upon their development as writers. Patricia Donahue, co-founder and director of the College Writing Program, and Bianca Falbo, codirector, recognized the potential of these narratives to contribute to scholarly conversations and embarked on a project to study the literacy narratives with the help of WAs. We were fortunate to be granted EXCEL scholarships that enabled us to work with Falbo to identify patterns in the literacy narratives, to categorize the narratives according to the identified patterns, and to establish a prototype for future research. This research continues today with current WAs.

The project produced so much valuable data that, with the encouragement of Donahue and Falbo, we decided to pursue two topics of interest to us: the WAs’ attitudinal changes about writing, education, and tutoring over the period of their employment and each WA’s self-identifications as student, tutor, and tutor-as-student. The following semester Donahue generously offered to conduct an independent study to help us develop our work into a conference presentation for the National Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing and into an essay for a new journal, *Young Scholars in Writing*. She guided us through the conference presentation and publishing processes by providing constant encouragement and valuable advice. Without the dedication and assistance of Donahue and Falbo, who recognized the value of undergraduate contributions to the discipline, we certainly would not be where we are today.

We are delighted to return to *Young Scholars in Writing* on its five-year anniversary to share our experiences with other undergraduates who may find themselves also wondering if their voices will carry beyond the journal’s pages or if, as undergraduates, they will remain silent within the scholarly discourse they hope and fear to join. The undergraduate scholarship published in *Young Scholars* is beginning to influence scholarly discourse as its founders envisioned. It has no less influenced each of our decidedly different lives—Heather as a scholar and Lindsey as a working professional.
**Heather: As a (Still Young) Scholar**

During my master’s program, I received an email from a current professor of mine entitled “Congratulations.” Certain that I had done nothing warranting praise, I found myself stunned and thrilled, yet oddly terrified, to discover that Lindsey and I, along with *Young Scholars in Writing*, had been cited in an essay. And not just any essay, an essay in College English. For the first time in my studies, I felt like a scholar. I was acknowledged as an active participant in the disciplinary conversation, no longer positioned merely as a passive object of it.

Even before Robillard’s article brought my and Lindsey’s voices into the disciplinary conversation, *Young Scholars* gave me the confidence necessary to join the composition and rhetoric community. Having participated in researching and publishing led me to apply to graduate programs containing significant research components. Once I was in graduate school, the *Young Scholars* experience helped to prepare me (as much as is possible) both to undertake the coursework and research set before me and to engage in my own research projects. I also felt more confident when meeting others at professional conferences and sharing my work with them. The publication of our essay, in particular, demystified the publishing process and encouraged me to submit my work to other journals.

The *Young Scholars* experience is valuable for those wishing to continue their studies into graduate school and to join the profession as future scholars and educators. For scholars, the journal provides essential lessons in scholarship; and for educators, it serves as an important reminder that our students, too, have voices that need to be heard. Now, as a composition and rhetoric PhD student at the University of Kansas, part of me is still that apprehensive and hesitant undergraduate fearful of both being silenced and being heard. But another part of me is a confident and assured scholar excited by the possibilities of being an active member in the on-going conversations of this intellectually challenging and rewarding disciplinary community.

**Lindsey: As a Working Professional**

While I certainly agree with many of the sentiments Heather has expressed, I would like to offer another perspective concerning the value of my continued involvement with *Young Scholars in Writing* to my professional life. Just prior to the publication of our essay in the journal, I graduated from college and began to think about my future career. As an English major, I had neither a clear, nor a confining, career path laid ahead of me. After obtaining an MSEd in higher education administration and policy from Northwestern University, I soon found my career niche in higher education development and fundraising. I also found that many of those skills I used in preparing to publish are relevant to my current career, in which I must have an appreciation for the editing process, an awareness of audience and the ways in which my words affect those I am addressing, and a strong attention to detail.

Still, my involvement with *Young Scholars in Writing* has affected my life in another way, one that I find even more precious. Soon after having our essay published, Heather and I, along with the other undergraduates who had published in volume 1, were given the opportunity to serve as peer reviewers and on the peer editorial board. This opportunity allows me to continue to work with and learn about the writing process, to read and consider the impact of scholarly works that are focused on one of my passions, and to help undergraduate students improve their writing and find an appreciation for contributing their research to a community that is beginning to find value in their work. Robillard’s consideration of our thoughts and use of our words in her *College English* essay have given me another reason to be proud of the work that Heather and I did as undergraduates, and I am truly excited to...
assist other students in making similar accomplishments that they, too, will have the opportunity to regard with pride.

**A Look Forward**

While we have taken different paths since the publication of our essay, we have done so with a shared appreciation for composition and rhetoric and for the value that our *Young Scholars in Writing* experiences have had on our lives. Robillard’s essay demonstrates the capacity of the journal and of the undergraduate voices and research contained within it to contribute significantly to on-going scholarly conversations. As such, we strongly encourage other scholars to support and engage the work of this innovative and important journal. We also encourage undergraduates to consider *Young Scholars* as a forum in which they can both prepare themselves for their future pursuits and join a scholarly community that has affected much of their lives and that will continue to affect those who come after them. Most importantly, we hope that our stories and experiences will inspire undergraduates to share their voices, knowing that they will not only be heard but also appreciated.

**Works Cited**


Robillard, Amy E. “Young Scholars Affecting Composition: A Challenge to Disciplinary Citation Practices.” *College English* 68.3 (Jan. 2006): 253–70.