

2018

Editors' Note

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Recommended Citation

Payer, Brittney and Shorer, Kristen. "Editors' Note." *Laurier Undergraduate Journal of the Arts* 5 (2018) : -. Print.

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Editors' Note

Brittney Payer and Kristen Shorer

Through all stages of the publication process, LUJA holds itself to the highest of academic standards; only the top 4% of submissions are selected and even they are put through a rigorous editing process. Both the reviewer and editorial teams partake in thorough training on academic convention and the qualities of a strong, publishable paper. All of these systems are in place to help eliminate subjectivity from the publication process, while increasing the alignment of papers with academic standards and conventions. Herein lies the contradiction. Writing is, by its nature, a subjective and personal expression; academia, on the other hand, prizes an objective, often unfeeling standard of “excellence.”

Academia has a reputation for rigidity and stoicism, characterized by a voice that simultaneously maximizes strength, authority, and expertise, while minimizing emotion and personality. As students of the arts, we encourage you to question this long accepted standard, the norms it reinforces, and its larger implications for representation in publication. If Western academic convention calls for a voice that meets these specific expectations, which forms of expression are being marginalized? How could the academic community benefit from exposure to non-normative writing conventions and expressions?

Greater freedom comes with greater success, and many professionally published authors might insert themselves into their texts, having earned the opportunity to integrate personal flair and emphasis. However, what we found while sitting in a room full of skilled undergraduate students was that any inclination toward creativity or flair was felt inhibited by convention; we had a model to follow, and, while deviation was not inherently wrong, no one really knew how to do it right.

This challenge arose again and again in LUJA’s publication process, and as you read through the 2018 edition, it will become clear that even those papers that fit academic standards of excellence differ greatly in their voice. Out of 150 remarkable submissions, we narrowed our choices to the eight you currently hold in your hands: the eight we felt best upheld academic standards while offering originality in thought and individuality in style. For instance, one can point to the contrast between Justin Manning’s to-the-point, direct style of writing, and Denise

Springett's diplomatic voice, and Jace Sillberbach's vivid, descriptive style; each of these variations serves their own purpose and, ultimately, is extremely effective at delivering an argument—one of the main goals in academic writing. Even this Editors' Note, though altered by efforts to create a unified voice, reveals the unique, distinct writing styles of our two Editors-in-Chief. So who is to say that one form is superior to the other?

In fact, as the papers were put through the editing process, the main difficulty became making choices between correcting for academic necessity and maintaining the integrity of the author's voice. For the fifth volume of LUJA, we decided to give each paper to two editors and then as Editors-in-Chief, merge those edits and add our own. Through this process, the subjectivity of even the most well-trained undergraduate editors became evident. Based on preference, personal writing style, area of study, and other factors, some editors would see problems where others saw insight; some saw passive voice where others saw justified hesitancy; some recognized informality where others identified moments of ease for the reader. Ultimately, despite the efforts of traditional education, a hegemonic academic voice will never be a reality.

Diversity in voice and style, however, is not a failure — it is something that should be protected and cherished. We ask you, as readers, writers, and editors, to consider, as you read through this volume, the personalized touches, the favourite lines, the surprising new viewpoints; to question tradition and expertise, as these papers do in their arguments, and discover a place for individuality and creativity.

As undergraduates, we are encouraged to challenge the boundaries of thought—perhaps it is time we challenge the boundaries of convention as well.