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An interview with faculty advisor Melanie Blood

Dimitri Wing-Paul

What does undergraduate research mean to you?

That's pretty broad. It can mean a great number of things. So, within the fields that I worked most often, which are English, Women's and Gender Studies, and Music and Musical Theatre, it has distinct meanings. One would be training in presenting academic work in a way that is accessible to whatever audience that you would be speaking to. In GREAT Day, it's generally your peers, students, and faculty. And then in the other area, it means performances, presentations in different performance forms. And I think that having opportunities like GREAT Day, like the COPLAC conference, like the SUNY undergrad research conference are things that Geneseo has a very high level of participation in; it's one of the things that really makes Geneseo unique that there are so many opportunities for students.

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

I think research, taken broadly, is one of the things that makes students more competitive as they leave the school, whether it's going into graduate programs, whether it's the job market. And I would hope that the culture of expectation to present in this kind of higher form, more competitive form, more professional form would inform the culture simply by making students more serious and aware of their goals after Geneseo, so that college really feels more... gives it more depth, makes it a bit more goal oriented at least a couple times a year.

What characteristics of Kylie Mathis' presentation made you nominate her research?

She did a Women's and Gender Studies capstone presentation. She's an Education major and Women's and Gender Studies concentrator. And last year out of her class of ten students in the senior capstone seminar plus the people who did independent work mostly off campus in internship formats, her work really stood out to me as having an excellent analytical approach so that the material that she found to speak about really showed a depth of research. And then, her own analysis applied to it was outstanding. She was talking about visual culture, and she also was able to support it extraordinary well with visual examples. Her presentation style was really fluid; she

was able to understand her audience and make her work really accessible and interesting to her audience. So, I'm very pleased that her work made it in!

Describe your mentorship role in facilitating the project.

As the coordinator of Women's and Gender Studies, I run a senior seminar every spring and I mentor the students who are doing an off-campus internship. [Mathis] was a part of the course that did both work in visual culture generally, work on film and feminism theory applied to film for about half of the semester, and then students developed their own project as well. They went through various steps: proposing their project, presenting a first round of research findings as they started to hone in on their thesis, then presenting a completed opening paragraph with a full thesis and an outline, and then preparing both a GREAT Day presentation and a written format, and presenting those for the class and then in their final form as well. So, it's pretty rigorous across the whole semester.

What is your management style as a faculty sponsor?

I do think those smaller steps that I was describing that I set up for the whole class are really important. That way no one step feels overwhelming. I remember when I was an undergraduate writing my thesis, I was actually doing philosophy, which was one of my majors in undergrad, and just facing the blank page and the thought of, "Oh my God! I have to finish this seventy-five to one-hundred-page document, and I'm staring at a blank page!" was kind of overwhelming. And my mentor at the time didn't set up this kind of concrete steps that I do but he did give me really good advice, which was just to get anything down in the page. Acing that blank page is the hardest thing. If you have anything down there, the process of revising is far easier than staring at a blank page. So, I just have, over course of my career, developed a series of smaller steps to help students.