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## Editor's Preface

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## Editor's Preface

Editorial: Academic Rigor and *Universitas*

This second issue of *Universitas* comes a good deal closer to some of the initial expectations and hopes for establishing a journal at the University of Northern Iowa: With Joel Haack's essay, "What Happened When a Mathematician Found Himself Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities," *Universitas* is proud to offer a contribution that consciously bridges the disciplinary boundaries between two areas that would usually define themselves as substantially different in their objectives and methodologies; "At Risk Students: Learning Science through Inquiry," a contribution by Shishonee Hughes and Cherin Lee, is the first project to showcase successful student-faculty collaboration; Fred Besthorn's "Instructional Techniques for Social Work Education," is our first essay in the section "Essays, Studies, and Works" to be subjected to blind external review before being accepted for publication; and Ron Sandvik's "Translittic Poetry" is the first "creative" piece we are publishing in *Universitas*. Lynn Nielsen's and Susan Koch's book reviews represent the kind of *critique engagée* a college-educated readership will appreciate. Finally, the "Forum" section on "Falling into Medievalism," which I had the pleasure to coedit with Anne Lair, for the first time extends the range of contributors from UNI faculty and students to colleagues researching and teaching at Kent State University and the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, and includes the first audio files as part of Nils Holger Petersen's negotiation of the role of the artist/scholar in creating/researching "medieval" music in "contemporary" times. Transdisciplinary, international, collaborative scholarly thinking, creating, and writing is definitely what this second issue of *Universitas* showcases and promotes. The December, 2006, issue of *Universitas*, with an exciting "Forum" section on "Masculinities," to be coedited by Phyllis Baker and Harry Brod, promises to continue this budding tradition. ([Call for Papers](#))

Most reactions to the inaugural issue of *Universitas* commented on the "Forum" section on "[Academic Rigor](#)," a collection of essays through which Sue Joslyn helped engender a lively discussion about academic practices on our campus. The published opinions on this issue as well as the mostly short responses I received all commented on aspects of *rigor* as it applies to teaching. Later discussions of the topic, for example on the College of Humanities and Fine Arts Discussion List or among the participants among last year's Carver Seminar on "Integrating Disciplines in the Liberal Arts Core" similarly focused on the classroom, examinations, and even syllabi. As someone who strongly believes in the interconnectedness of teaching and research/scholarship, I would insist, however, that faculty, as students' first and immediate role models, need to demonstrate the meaning, implications, and consequences of 'rigorous' work before asking that students perform it. If we demand, for example, that our graduate students distinguish between refereed web sites and non-refereed ones for their assignments or make informed distinctions between monographs and edited collections in annotated bibliographies and research essays, we must first ourselves stop listing - in our *curricula vitae*, Dean's Annual Reports, and Program Review documents - short entries in non-refereed encyclopedias as scholarly "essays," claiming that we have published a "book" when the volume in question is an "essay

collection" in which we publish other scholars' work, and boasting that we have published fifty "scholarly reviews" when the average length of those reviews amounts to less than 400 words. If we want our students to have faith in the criteria we use for judging and grading their burgeoning efforts, we must first ourselves cease giving tenure and promotion solely based on years of service or on the notoriously fickle notion of "collegiality," distributing merit pay on the basis of the quantity of published titles instead of their quality and refereed character, and handing out awards for faculty excellence only because the funding allows for the uninterrupted annual bestowing of such honors. Or, to define "rigor" more positively and relate it to this journal: If we should like our graduate students to become successful members of our various professions and fields and to produce respected publishable work, our own publications will need to be models of thorough research, creative thinking, appropriate style, and exemplary editorial exactitude.

It is in the pursuit of such lofty academic goals, established through centuries of academic endeavors and continually renegotiated by each new generation of scholars and artists, that *Universitas* welcomes two kinds of submissions: Invited works and essays from the UNI faculty and graduate student awardees of well deserved academic honors on the one hand, and regular submissions to be subjected to blind external review on the other hand. The former submissions, invited because of the authors' proven excellence in a given specialty area, will be read and edited by the editor and the members of the editorial advisory board of our journal; the latter will profit from a meticulous outside evaluation by one or two expert readers, including recommendations for revision and change. In either case, there is the possibility of rejection, but a rejection that will always be based on the sound academic decision making essential to the quality control which should govern solid academic work. I am asking all future contributors, readers, and referees for their steadfast support so that *Universitas* may maintain high standards of quality.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who assisted me in editing this second issue: From the ranks of graduate students, Nikki Wilson Clasby (editorial assistant) and John Campbell (technical assistant); from the ranks of faculty and administrators, Susan Koch (Graduate Dean), Sue Joslyn (Associate Graduate Dean), our external readers, the members of the *Universitas* advisory board, and all of our contributing authors and artists.

Richard Utz, Editor



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