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John (Jack) Resch, Professor of History, UNHM

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Inquiry Journal

Undergraduate Research Journal : Spring 2013

Mentor Highlights

John Resch

—Jennifer Lee

Dr. John (Jack) Resch is a professor of history and program coordinator of the humanities division at the University of New Hampshire Manchester, where he has been for almost forty years.

Below is a correspondence with Professor Resch about his own research and his mentoring experiences with undergraduate students.

Inquiry: What is your current research? Did your undergraduate studies point you toward it? What interests you most about it?

JR: Although I continue to publish in my area of specialization, the American Revolution and Early Republic, I have recently turned to larger thematic interests, specifically to the development of democracy and to issues of social justice and race in America. These recent interests have been the basis of new topical courses I am offering in history and the humanities.

My publications and new topics are distant from my undergraduate concentration in European history; my master's thesis, "Vilna and the League of Nations;" and my doctoral dissertation, "Anglo-American Efforts in Prison Reform." If there are any lessons for undergraduates to learn from my zigzag track, they might be that the study of history is intrinsically interesting and useful, and that it does not occur in a silo—breadth enriches the specific—and that in choosing to specialize, I let my interests guide me without fear of changing course.



Dr. Resch in the Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia, Chile,
January 2013

Inquiry: What is the purpose of a mentoring relationship? What should the student and you gain from it?

JR: The purpose of mentoring undergraduates is to foster the interests, talents, intellect, and academic skills of the student, and to support their personal growth. Students are often not the best judge of their potential and gifts. The role of the mentor is to see those abilities and to assist the student in recognizing and developing them. Mentors guide and assist rather than lead and direct. The end result should not only be the tangible product of the research but, more importantly, intangible changes in the student. The student should feel more confident to do research, should have a heightened sense of independence to form and support his/her views, have a greater self-awareness of his/her abilities, and acquire a healthy skepticism when dealing with assertions and evidence. Good research not only answers questions but also reveals new questions as well as what is not known or cannot be known. It should help the student distinguish between integrity and arrogance in scholarship and media. Witnessing a student's personal and academic growth is the faculty member's reward.

Inquiry: Please describe some positive, memorable mentoring experiences or mentees.

JR: I have had several mentees who are memorable, but two that stand out are Jim Piecuch and Lowell Mower.

Jim, who is now a tenured professor at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, was a non-traditional student with a family and also a full-time employee of the Manchester Fire Department. His talents were obvious, in particular his love of research and exceptional skill as a writer. In his senior year he published an article in *Historical New Hampshire* based on a paper written in his history Capstone Seminar. This success led him to change his life course. Jim left the security of his job to pursue an academic career, earning his master's degree at UNH and doctorate at William and Mary. To date he has written or edited a total of seven books and has become a leading historian of the South in the American Revolution.

Lowell enrolled in UNHM after an unsuccessful venture at another institution. He had an academic breakthrough doing a research project in my Inquiry course. He experienced the pleasure of research and satisfaction of academic excellence. His interest in constitutional and ideological arguments leading to the American Revolution led him to research a political conflict over an obscure 18th-century Massachusetts tax on wine. The results were a research article in *Inquiry* 2012 and plans for entering a graduate program in history.

In both of these cases, as well as the others, mentoring transformed student lives and reaffirmed why we, as faculty, teach.

Inquiry: Please describe any difficulties or problems you have had in mentoring undergraduates.

JR: I don't have anything to say about difficulties because I haven't had any in my many years of mentoring undergraduates.

Inquiry: What advice or tips would you give a faculty member new to undergraduate mentoring?

JR: The advice I would give a faculty member new to undergraduate mentoring is to take the opportunity to be a mentor. Being a mentor will enrich your professional life in ways that can't be achieved in classroom teaching. It will affirm your career choice of becoming a scholar and teacher, and leave an indelible mark on you and the student.

Read Lowell Mower's *Inquiry* '12 article, [The 1754 Excise on Spirituous Liquors: Taxes, Political Rhetoric, and the English Concept of Liberty in Eighteenth-Century Colonial Massachusetts](#)

[Top of Page >>](#)

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