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Special Focus:

**ALTERNATIVES TO THE
RESEARCH PAPER**

Volume 7

Number 1

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

It is common knowledge that student writers operate best when they know and care about their topics. Unfortunately, common knowledge doesn't always lead to commonsense practice, particularly when the syllabus calls for teaching the research paper. Too often students and teachers alike approach "that" part of the writing curriculum with dread. To justify ourselves, we explain to our students that they must "develop their research skills" in order to be prepared for the academic and professional rigors lurking just outside the classroom doors. Our writing courses, once playful and personal, become survival courses—a training ground for difficult times to come. And we know what we get—attitudes ranging from *ennui* to doggedness, topics ranging from tank warfare in the Korean conflict to computer technology "in today's modern society," and writing products ranging from smothering stacks of 3x5 cards to soulless pastiches of source material which numb reader and writer alike. Our problem is clear: we want our students to grow and to *commit*, yet the traditional, skill-centered research project often creates an environment where growth and commitment are unlikely to occur.

To help us deal with this problem, the contributors to this issue of *LAJM* offer alternatives to the traditional library research paper. In the keynote article, Susan Tchudi describes how her students go from interviewing to publication, using primary sources to research a self-selected aspect of their school environment. Bill Palmer then explains how he uses both personal and public writing to help students think deeply about their first-hand research into a college human anatomy laboratory. Moving both the reader and their students beyond school walls into the community at large, Linda Boynton shows us how she uses the "saturation report" to help her students research local institutions. Liz deBeer describes how writing an interview-based profile can help students develop an in-depth understanding of local community members, and Virginia Polanski explains how her students use non-traditional research activities to explore a local issue or problem. Our final two articles take student-researchers beyond their communities: Tom Muldar tells how he has students use available materials they themselves can acquire to construct itineraries and travel guides to faraway national parks, while Maribeth Carroll describes how her humanities students use drama, costuming, and non-traditional writing to immerse themselves in their research of people and events of bygone days.

In our keynote article, Susan Tchudi points out that "all of us are researchers." Our challenge is to get the real world of research, in which researchers know and care about their subjects, into the classroom. The articles in this issue of *LAJM* will help all of us to meet that challenge.

The Editors