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From the President

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A component of the University of Kentucky Strategic Plan, and integral to a Carnegie designated “Research University - Very High research activity (RU/VH; Carnegie Classification update, 2005)” institution, is the embodiment of faculty-mentored research in the undergraduate educational experience. Although it is intuitively obvious to those who engage in research, numerous studies by education experts indicate participation in research by undergraduate students results in improved retention, greater satisfaction, and overall success in their careers and beyond. We strive at the University of Kentucky to foster undergraduate research in every way possible, from group dissemination of information about research opportunities in the first year of undergraduate study, to one-on-one counseling of individual students throughout their education. At various points along their research progression, we get the honor of learning about their methods, discoveries, and insights, in part through this on-line journal of undergraduate scholarship, Kaleidoscope.

The excellence, creativity, and diversity of scholarly research done by our students are illustrated in this volume - from highlights of individual projects, to discussion of various research programs, competitive awards, and newsworthy research advances. In addition to the scholarly works of those highlighted in this issue, there are scores of other undergraduate students engaged in research, some of whom will be showcased in future issues. We applaud the efforts of all of these students and their dedication to excellence by going ‘above and beyond’ their routine studies and delving deep into the questions that surround their field of inquiry.

While the students are indeed dedicated and talented, we maintain their success is highly dependent on the devotion and mastery of their faculty mentors, who work side by side with these gifted undergraduates to prepare them for the rigors of their chosen careers. This type of instruction challenges both mentor and student, with great benefit to each. The achievements of our students locally, nationally, and internationally speak to the success of this type of collaborative, hands-on instruction. Also attributable to the faculty mentors is notable funding obtained through grants and contracts, which supports the wide variety of studies being conducted by all levels of researchers at UK. Such extramural support provides opportunities for students in the way of: exposure to the workings of established research teams, necessary resources and materials, and opportunities for travel to conferences and meetings to present data, develop professional networks, and gain global perspective.

Please join us in congratulating the undergraduate students whose intriguing and in-depth studies, and in many cases, heartfelt passions, are published in this issue of Kaleidoscope.