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## Invited Introduction

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Welcome to the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Environmental and Resource Economics at Colby*. As an alumna of a liberal arts college and a professor of environmental and resource economics in a Tier 1 research university, I am honored and excited to have the opportunity to pen a few words of introduction to this impressive undertaking. My understanding of the value of this new journal is rooted in the answers to two questions: why is research an important part of undergraduate education? And how does this journal promote and enhance the undergraduate research experience for the students engaged with it?

Research is the process of asking interesting or important questions, working to answer those questions, and communicating what you have learned to other people. Engaging in independent research cultivates curiosity and independence and develops both communication and problem solving skills. Those skills, habits, and inclinations are of great value to undergraduates in the years after their degrees whether life leads them into academia or into a career in private industry, NFOs, or government service. Furthermore, the process of carrying out a research projects helps students solidify much of what they have learned in their previous coursework. Nothing embeds a theory or quantitative method in your mind like trying to use it, and nothing improves writing skills more than writing a paper you care about because it communicates your own discoveries.

This new journal does much to enhance the research and learning experience for students involved in it. Research is more rewarding if the audience of readers for the work is larger than the single professor who usually reads student papers. A student who expects her research to appear in an open-access journal has the promise (and threat) of a wide range of readers that provides extra motivation for excellence in the research process. Of course, many professional journals exist. However, student publication in typical professionally-reviewed journals can be stymied by demands for methodological perfection that may not be reasonable for an undergraduate with limited time for the project. *JEREC* can offer peer-reviewed publication with standards that are appropriate for ambitious and talented undergraduate researchers. Indeed, *JEREC* provides students with the opportunity to determine what those standards should be for themselves. The journal is student reviewed as well as authored, and as such provides undergraduates with unusual and valuable experience with the other side of the publication process. They can learn much about research by evaluating the work of others and by deciding what their community's standards are going to be.

The promise of this journal is already coming to fruition with the outstanding contributions to this first issue. The papers pose interesting and important questions and use a range of professional research methods. Some tackle classic topics in environmental and natural resource economics, while others embody the surprising cross-subject pollination that is the hallmark of intellectual life in a liberal arts college. Many of these papers and their authors could have academic futures. Publication in *JEREC* is an excellent step along that path, or along any path to a future that benefits from inquisitiveness, tenacious problem solving, and the ability to tell people about the problems you have solved.

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