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Blumhardt '18 Gains Experience and Honors through Research

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Blumhardt '18 Gains Experience and Honors through Research

- *After assisting professor Michael Lackey with his research on biofiction, Zoe Blumhardt '18 pursued her own successful research project.*
- *Morris's focus on student-faculty research partnerships gave Blumhardt the chance to develop her own interests in an academic setting.*
- *Blumhardt is using her knowledge to plan lessons for student teaching.*

In summer 2016 Zoe Blumhardt '18, Bemidji, worked with Distinguished McKnight Professor of English Michael Lackey on his research exploring the ethical implications of children's biofiction.

Blumhardt's Journey

Blumhardt, an English and elementary education major, later built on this experience to pursue an Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) project to delve into her own ideas on the subject, earning awards and opportunities to present her research along the way.

This partnership between faculty and students, Blumhardt says, afforded her the chance to develop her own interests in an academic setting.

Blumhardt first became interested in researching children's biofiction while working with Lackey on the topic in a Morris Academic Partnership (MAP), which allows professors to select academically talented students to assist them in their research and projects. She was drawn to the challenge of pursuing research in an area with little existing discussion, and the work suited her passions in both literature and education.

After Lackey interviewed two famous authors of biofiction, Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris, Blumhardt transcribed the interview. She also compiled a bibliography of 100 biographical novels for children and young adults, which Lackey published alongside his article, ["The Ethical Benefits and Challenges of Biofiction for Children."](#)

"It seemed that this project would be a great blending of my majors," Blumhardt says. "[It was] a great opportunity to learn from and work alongside a professor who was expanding upon a fairly new conversation in literature."

The Next Phase

After her initial exploration of children's biofiction, Blumhardt pursued her own research through a UROP grant, which offers financial awards for students to undertake their own scholarly projects in a partnership with a faculty member.

Part of the controversy surrounding biofiction for children arises from the idea that altering historical facts and characters for the sake of fiction can create false or misleading representations of history. Blumhardt wanted to examine the ethics of children's biofiction when children were exposed to a continuing conversation in the form of a note or afterword by the author. She concluded that by fostering these continuing conversations, authors enable readers to understand the changes made to the historical and biographical record, creating a more accessible and ethical text.

In addition to speaking on campus alongside Lackey at a presentation titled "The Art of Faculty/Student Publishing in the Humanities," she also presented her research at the 2017

National Conference on Undergraduate Research at the University of Memphis, Tennessee. Given her scholarly work, Blumhardt received the 2017 Scholar of the College Award, which recognizes students for their contributions to scholarship.

“This felt like the culmination of all of the work I had done working with Michael as well as branching out into my own research and presentations,” Blumhardt says.

The Big Picture

Blumhardt is using her knowledge to plan lessons for student teaching. She hopes to someday become a professor who specializes in curriculum and design in an education program.

“This would allow me to continue to be a part of the academic conversation, and it would give future students opportunities for research and other academic pursuits like the ones I was afforded,” Blumhardt says.

To learn more about the research and creative opportunities at Morris, visit ace.morris.umn.edu.

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