Letter from Dr. Shannon L. Blanton, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Programs & Professor of Political Science

It is my pleasure to introduce you to our inaugural issue of QuaesitUM, the University of Memphis’ new undergraduate research journal. Related to the Latin term “quaerere” which means to seek or ask, the word “quaesitum” connotes that which is sought. As such, it reflects the heart of the research endeavor. Anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston summarized this well, saying “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”

As one of America’s great metropolitan research universities, the University of Memphis is strongly committed to integrating research into our undergraduate students’ academic experience. For undergraduate students, the research process enables a deeper investigation of questions of keen interest; on a more personal level, it also facilitates collaboration between students and faculty. It builds upon the true intent of higher education as an intellectual process through which one develops not only substantive knowledge but also analytic tools and the capacity for critical thinking so as to better explore and evaluate new topics of inquiry.

This inaugural issue is the culmination of a process that dates back to the fall of 2012, when we first began to discuss how a research journal might provide a way to recognize the work of outstanding undergraduate scholars and further encourage our students to engage in research. While it began as an extension of our efforts to nurture greater research opportunities within our rapidly-growing honors program, we quickly recognized that it would be a valuable opportunity to promote undergraduate research
writ large. Thus, this journal is intended for all students across all disciplines – as both readers and potential authors – who seek to better understand some aspect of the world around us. As a forum for undergraduate research, this journal enables us to appreciate the diversity of intellectual puzzles and knowledge across our campus, and to recognize the contributions of our undergraduate scholars who have made the journey from being solely consumers of the research of others to producers of original research that helps us to see things more clearly.

The University of Memphis’ motto is “Dreamers, Thinkers, Doers” and undergraduate research draws on these three key components of the university experience. Research calls for us to be dreamers as we must first identify and ask a question; it requires us to be thinkers as we must deeply consider the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of our research question; and it enables us to be doers as we rigorously assess and examine the issues that we view as important so that our insights and solutions can be put into action. The student scholarship within these pages reflects these ideals, and provides an exemplary foundation for the launch of QuaesitUM.

I extend my sincere congratulations to these undergraduate researchers, and offer my deepest appreciation to all who made publication of this inaugural issue a reality. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Sage Graham for her commitment and effectiveness as Faculty Editor/Advisor, and Dr. Melinda Jones for her leadership in guiding this idea into fruition. I would also like to recognize Interim President Brad Martin and Provost David Rudd for their commitment to the success of our undergraduate students. Finally, I enthusiastically encourage others to pursue their research interests for inclusion in future issues.