Programs that actively engage students in research and scholarship are the touchstone for integrating undergraduate education with authentic scholarly inquiry. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that undergraduate research experiences (URE) are related to increased student learning and development, increased levels of retention, increased enrollment in graduate school, and increased understanding of research as a vocation and profession. However, these seminal studies focus on URE in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) disciplines. Although there are some studies that explore undergraduate research in the social sciences and humanities, the accepted models and best practices of undergraduate research are entrenched in the disciplinary culture of science. When overlaying the models of disciplinary culture and paradigms of research, it is clear that structures that support the scholarship enterprise in biology, for example, will not be as successful in history or philosophy. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to explore how faculty in the humanities describe the meaning of scholarship, scholarly process, and how that process influences how they work with undergraduate researchers and scholars.

For this study, in depth interviews were conducted with seven faculty members in the humanities. These interviews resulted in six themes that describe the essence of the faculty participants’ experiences. These themes include: the centrality of the humanities,
the life of the mind, the importance of guided practice, the development of a scholarly voice, the intention and impact of UGR, and how scholarship is informed by the community. These themes illustrate how the very nature of the culture and epistemology of the humanities disciplines in turn influences the nature of the undergraduate experience. In addition, faculty mentors emphasize the values and skills needed to engage in the “life of the mind” and how those skills benefit students’ abilities to find their own scholarly voices and become engaged citizens. This study demystifies the nature of undergraduate research in the humanities from a faculty mentor perspective. Moreover, the study provides some guidance to faculty mentors for possible models for engaging with undergraduate researchers and administrators interested in increasing the capacity and depth of UREs for students in the humanities.