

Foreword

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With this eighth issue, *aspeers* continues to evolve both as an important venue for emerging scholars of American studies and as a laboratory in which to try out and refine techniques for project-driven teaching on the MA level. Indeed, looking back over the past seven issues, the journal's success is evident in the biographies of its authors and editors. For many Americanists who are now doing scholarship on the doctoral level or beyond, *aspeers* was the first publication, an important stepping stone on their way into the field. Indeed, in addition to the journal's contributors' success, subscriptions and citations, as well as the impressive number of submissions we have received for this issue underscore how much *aspeers* has become a constant of the American studies landscape in Germany and Europe.

As a teaching project, the particular quality of *aspeers* is the journal's permanent rejuvenation: each issue is assembled by a new team of student editors and, accordingly, each cohort reinvents the journal and the editing process—at least to some extent. This constitutes not only a particular challenge but it also creates a unique opportunity to keep improving the didactics of project-driven learning. This year, for example, we introduced an experimental teaching format in which the students, rather than being coached throughout the process, were offered individual workshops providing them with key skills and best practices necessary (or helpful) for getting the job done. All other details, beginning with the selection and scheduling of the workshops, the time line for the overall process, the forming of subgroups, the decision of when to enlist additional expertise from a former *aspeers* editor turned editorial assistant, along with many other facets of the overall project, were left to the immensely motivated and skilled group of first-year MA students. The guiding principle for this teaching experiment was “ownership of the process,” and it was indeed remarkable to see how quickly the students made this issue of *aspeers* their own—in the process of creating it.

One of the most visible consequences of this experimental format and the freedoms it provides are the two paratextual pieces written by this year's editors. Where previous cohorts had decided to write one longer, topical introduction to the issue, this

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year's team wrote one short introduction, opening the issue by briefly presenting the papers following it, and a slightly longer coda with editorial observations at the end, observations on moments of intersection and dialog between the contributions. These two editorial texts flank the seven contributions that form the body of the issue.

In its first run, this new, experimental format required a larger staff of instructors. Former head editor Florian Bast not only offered a workshop on evaluating scholarly work. He also was available for the students during the accept-reject discussion of all submissions, providing guidance where needed so that the students could gain the confidence and expertise necessary for such difficult decisions. Former *aspeers* editor and long-time editorial assistant Stefan Schubert offered a workshop on line editing and helped out with particularly tricky questions, and former *aspeers* editor and supervising editor Wiebke Kartheus offered a workshop on professional communication and was available to help during the line editing phase. Joining this teaching experiment, they were indispensable in the making of this issue and in further developing *aspeers* as a teaching format.

Whatever topical focus the next issue of *aspeers* will be built around and whatever new experiments in teaching the ninth issue of the journal will bring about, *aspeers* will continue to be both a platform for didactic experimentation and, for more and more young Americanists, the first contact with the world of academic publishing.