

# Foreword

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This third issue of *aspeers* marks the project's increasing integration into the landscape of academic publishing in European American studies. Its success in the last two years underscores the need for a venue that allows young, emerging scholars to publish their work early on and to collaborate in the process. At the same time, the past three years have also given evidence of some of the particular challenges of offering a periodical for graduate work in a European context.

*aspeers*'s integration into Google Scholar and a number of journal directories had already helped boost its exposure in the first two years. In 2009, a new venue added to the project's visibility: EBSCOhost contacted the editorial team asking to include the publication in several of their database packages. This listing has further increased the journal's international circulation, a development clearly visible in the web site access statistics. Possibly an even better marker of this increasing impact are the first *aspeers* articles being cited by authors around the world. Another crucial indicator of the journal's growing attraction is the number of submissions that has peaked in this editing cycle and that has given this year's student editors a particularly rich selection to choose from. Lastly, the editors' participation in a panel on "New Forms of Publication" at the 2009 annual DGfA convention underscored the extent to which *aspeers* has already become an integral part of an increasingly diverse and vivid environment of scholarly publishing in German American studies, an aspect also central to Professor Peter Schneck's greeting for the second issue.

Similar to this external success, the experiences within this year's editing cycle have once again underscored the possibilities and the productivity of project-driven learning in the context of the MA education. We have extensively commented on the didactic dimension of this project in the previous foreword (Koenen and Herrmann), and the experiences of 2009/10 have again evidenced that the level of student interaction and the excellent learning experience are indeed an inherent property of the project. Adding an outside perspective to the group's discussion, this year's editorial team also

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had the extraordinary opportunity to enjoy a guest lecture by Professor John Boles of Rice University, who stayed with American Studies Leipzig as Leibniz Chair during our university's six-hundredth anniversary. Speaking from many years of experience as general editor of the *Journal of Southern History*, Professor Boles shared insights and advice with the student editors. Most importantly, he commented on the broad and profound impact the *JSH* has on scholarship on Southern History and on the role any journal will have on the field it is dedicated to. The purpose of a journal, he argued, is not simply to publish the work that is there, but to encourage particular kinds of scholarship, to push for standards, formal as well as intellectual, and to generally help develop and cultivate the discipline.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, albeit on an infinitely smaller level, such questions of standards have become a central concern for this year's editorial team. As in 2008, submissions from across Europe have given evidence of the diversity of voice, the variety of academic traditions, and the plethora of formal styles prevalent in European higher education. Having undergone less 'disciplining' than more established researchers, young scholars might show even more diverse national or regional styles of writing and thinking. For *aspeers*, this variety is at once an asset and a challenge. The 2010 student editors have accordingly faced difficult discussions on how much homogeneity a journal for young scholars in American studies should enforce and how much diversity of styles it should celebrate.<sup>2</sup> In the ensuing discussions, arguments to simply accept the historically and regionally contingent nature of what young German Americanists consider to be good American studies scholarship had to be weighed against the practical need to judge other people's work and against the journal's larger responsibility to help encourage disciplinary unity by rewarding scholarship that adheres to particular formal and intellectual rules. In difficult discussions, the editors decided to emphasize unity of style, but have, at the same time, started to look for ways to facilitate more dialogue with other European students on this matter. Rather than lowering the formal requirements, more openness to contributions beyond the annual frame topic might be one way to make the journal more inclusive without sacrificing quality, a change we will look into for upcoming issues.

In related considerations as to how inclusive *aspeers* should be in its mission to map the landscape of young scholarship, this year's editors had to tackle another complex question: In a still diverse landscape of different degrees, what exactly constitutes the journal's target audience (and intended core group of contributors)? Are only students

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1 On a very similar note, cf. the interview with Professor Hornung in this issue.

2 For a linguistic exploration of the different traditions of, for example, writing in Anglophone and Polish contexts, cf. Anna Duszak. For earlier comments on the difficulties of forming a single voice, cf. the first issue's introduction (Carmody et al.).

currently enrolled in an MA program eligible to submit? Would that exclude students who have just finished their degree? Are advanced, gifted BA students, writing on the level of solid MA work, allowed to contribute? Are PhD students in integrated programs that cover both MA and PhD education entitled to submit? How strict, and how formalist, should one go about drawing these boundaries? This question, too, will be an ongoing conversation for the upcoming editorial teams. Emphasizing the project's mission to showcase the best work done by emerging scholars, this year's group has decided that content can trump formal requirements. The decision is not about content alone. Rather, it marks the effort to map not only the core, but also the fringes of those two short years that form the MA experience.

In a third twist on such questions of standardization, *aspeers* has, with its 2010 issue, switched to the seventh edition of the MLA guidelines, which has brought changes significant enough for a number of other journals to hesitate performing this transition. Accompanying this shift is the publication of the journal's house rules on the *aspeers* homepage, another attempt to share insights into the practical aspects of publishing with a larger graduate audience, to invite a wider dialogue on the project, and to participate in the field's publishing landscape.

The next issue of *aspeers*, scheduled for 2011, will see a continuation of many of the discussions sketched in this foreword and, hopefully, will be able to report the continuing success of the project and its ongoing integration into European American studies.

## WORKS CITED

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