NARRATIVE STATEMENT
JEFFREY MANTZ, ANTHROPOLOGY

I am delighted to have been nominated for the OSCAR Mentoring Excellence Award. While I admit that the prospect of profiting off what really amounts to my students' hard work makes the process of writing this narrative a bit uneasy, I do really appreciate this recognition of my attempts to cultivate student research.

I have long been a steadfast believer in the value of mentored undergraduate research. I ran two field schools early in my career, taking 11 students to Dominica in 2006, and with two other faculty taking 35 to Cuba in 2002. I have supervised many student research projects in 10 years of teaching, on many occasions taking students with me to the field. But more recently here at George Mason, I have been needled more by a desire to aid highly enthusiastic students who have had less access to me because of classroom expectations associated with my position. Since coming to George Mason, my class sizes have grown exponentially, and I have commonly been tasked with teaching those large courses at the upper 300-level. Because of an odd quirk in our institutional history, where our 100-level classes did not meet university general education requirements following the breakup of the College of Arts and Sciences in 2007, our 300 level courses have been targeted for large, university-wide general education audiences. I teach very popular classes at the 300-level (Zombies and Myth, Magic and Mind, both which get over 200 students), and thus have not been able to offer students the close seminar environment normally associated with upper level courses in a major like anthropology. I started to worry about whether my more motivated students were developing the skills they needed for post-college success, so I created individualized arrangements or small environments such that certain majors could pursue their research interests. This included directed salons for groups of students to have smaller discussions, as well as the supervision of individual projects, most recently in Tanzania, Honduras, and Rwanda. Field research experience and scholarship help these students develop skills that are increasingly becoming absolutely essential, both inside and outside of the academy. It is one of the few things associated with George Mason that I continue to do as I am on leave (I am currently directing the Cultural Anthropology Program at the National Science Foundation, which I did in part because I figured this was the best way to gain the knowledge necessary to pursue funding for undergraduate student research in the future). My hope is that this will become part of our institutional culture in the future such we can develop a program for at least basic research training for all majors.

My students are all tremendous success stories, but to be honest the deck has been stacked in my favor. I just try to match students up with what they are good at. And sometimes, in fact most of the time, that involves something outside academe. I essentially think of myself as a very effective scout, who has been fortunate to be exposed to some really outstanding talent. And I do it mainly because I see some students who just need a little prodding, a sense that they are actually capable of doing these things that seem very abstract to them: learn a language, travel to a remote place, organize a project there. It is somewhat of a miracle that I am in academia myself. I got here just because some really selfless people helped me along the way. They believed a kid from a somewhat sketchy background had a lot to offer. So these are not just lines on my CV that can enhance my public profile. These are the relationships that I feel make me who I am. A publication or presentation is a happy accomplishment; each can succeed or fail in long-term memory of a discipline. But the intellectual promise I help cultivate endures long after my article on the implications of the Dodd-Frank Act on Congolese mining is forgotten. I come into contact with many students with much more potential than I had at their age, and I just want to give them the same shot I got.