Joyce Kinhead on Immersive Writing Experiences and Cultivating Undergraduate Research

“I often discover what I’m thinking through writing,” says Joyce Kinkead, Distinguished Professor of English at Utah State University. As a small-town, first-generation college student, Dr. Kinkead said that her local library growing up was her lifeline and instilled in her the desire to be a writer. But, even then, Dr. Kinkead would not have believed that she’d eventually publish 14 books.

Her latest book covers the history of writing, which she started researching when her husband taught a course in the anthropology of writing. It was at that point Dr. Kinkead realized that she, a writing expert, “didn’t know squat” about the history of writing. Dr. Kinkead’s research took her all over the world, where she engaged in hands-on learning like making her own paper. “You really learn well by getting your hands on research and doing the activity,” she said.

That hands-on mentality and a deep commitment to students’ ability to write well naturally led Dr. Kinkead to undergraduate research, where her impact on USU’s undergraduate research program is indelible. It was Dr. Kinkead who started the Utah Conference on Undergraduate Research and Research on Capitol Hill programs, centralized undergraduate research efforts under one administrative office, and revitalized the campus inclusion of undergraduate researchers. And it all started when Dr. Kinkead found her students wrote better when they had a concrete audience to write to, one that wasn’t just her.

When asked if the writing process is ever done, Dr. Kinkead says, “We’re never done, we’re never done. There’s always something more.” Just as there is always something more to do to engage our undergraduates in research projects across campus.