



Abigail (Maurer) Murrish

*BS in Agricultural Communications, Minor in Food and Agribusiness Management from Purdue University (2013)*

### What have you been doing since the publication of your article in *JPUR*, volume 3?

Immediately following college graduation, I worked for the Indiana State Department of Agriculture as the assistant director of communications. After working there, I moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where I founded Murrish Communications, LLC, my freelance writing and communications business. In addition to writing and managing social media for small businesses and nonprofits, I also host the podcast *Our Midwestern Life* and write at [abigailmurrish.com](http://abigailmurrish.com).

### What are your career goals?

Looking to the future, I want to continue to grow in my writing and communications skills, with the goal of writing a book that discusses the intersection theology, place making, and agriculture.

### How did the research you did as an undergraduate at Purdue impact your current endeavors? What is the value of undergraduate research?

My undergraduate research at Purdue prepared me for my current work (both personal and professional) in four key ways. First, I learned how to ask questions, gather qualitative data, and posit theories based on the answers I received from interviews. Along with that, my experience taught me that it is imperative to bring diverse and overlooked voices to the conversations and integrate those voices into the research. The research process taught me to analyze and address problems from a place of creativity and imagination instead of simply continuing with the status quo. Finally, the process—from interviewing participants to writing the paper to presenting my findings at a conference—honed my communication and writing skills.

**VOICES FROM THE TABLE**

**Student Author**

Abigail Maurer is a 2013 agricultural communication graduate of Purdue University. Maurer began looking into the cultural ramifications of food insecurity during her junior year of college when she assisted Dr. Abigail Borron with her doctoral thesis. While at Purdue, Maurer maintained the social media sites for the Brian Lamb School of Communication, assisted in the agricultural communication program, and served on the leadership committee of Reformed University Fellowship. Maurer plans on working in the agricultural industry following graduation before beginning a freelance career in writing.



**Mentor**

Abigail Borron is an assistant professor of agricultural communication in the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education. Her research focuses on culture-centered communication with emphasis in marginalized audiences and university engagement. Inducted as an associated member of the Purdue University Teaching Academy in 2012, Borron teaches courses on interactive web strategies and oral communication in science and agriculture. Borron received her bachelor's degree in English from Indiana University-Purdue University of Fort Wayne, and her master's degree and doctorate in agricultural communication from Purdue University.



**Abstract**

Food insecurity rates continue to rise in the United States, which create a greater disparity between those who are food secure and those who are food insecure. Existing literature indicates that such a disparity is affected directly and indirectly through cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic factors.

The objectives of this project were designed to place culture as a central construct for understanding food insecurity and security. The objectives include (1) identifying common attitudes, beliefs, values, and patterns of participants' food culture, whether food insecure or secure; (2) gaining a deeper understanding of the unique cultures that exist within food secure and food insecure audiences; and (3) formulating guiding questions for future research in the area of food culture and food insecurity. Using methods in ethnography and grounded theory, the collective voices of each audience were captured and observed with the purpose of understanding and differentiating the various cultures in play.

The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, resulting in three themes emerging from the data. These themes indicate that the food insecure often encounter problems pertaining to food acquisition that arise from geographic situations and personal habits. The project highlighted how the food secure and the food insecure share similar challenges, but how they cope with the challenges in different ways.

Maurer, A. (2013). Voices from the table: Assessing the dynamic cultures of the food insecure and the food secure. *Journal of Purdue Undergraduate Research*, 3, 58-63. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5703/jpur.03.1.09>

**Keywords**

ethnography, culture, cultural understanding, food insecurity, grounded theory

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### How did the faculty mentor relationship impact you during your time at Purdue?

Professor Borron not only taught me how to conduct thoughtful interviews, highlight disenfranchised voices and experiences, and analyze qualitative data, but she also showed me what it looks like through her example as a researcher and professor. Professor Borron showed me the incredible good that research can do when conducted for the right reasons and with effective methodologies.

### How did the experience of publishing an article in *JPUR* benefit you? What advice would you give to other undergraduates at Purdue who are interested in contributing to the journal?

Publishing a *JPUR* article spurred me to document my work and celebrate that work, which otherwise would have only been an interesting extracurricular activity I did in college. Moreover, the journal offered me a place to discuss my findings and contribute to the larger discussion on food insecurity. If a student wants to contribute to the journal and has a professor willing to mentor them, she should do it. Even though I didn't pursue graduate studies, the experience uniquely prepared me to pursue professional and personal goals.

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**What advice would you give to other undergraduates at Purdue who are interested in doing research?**

Research is exciting, but it is also challenging and boring; the experience will have highs and lows. Find a mentor who will know when to encourage you and when to push you. And be prepared to change. The stories you hear will stay with you the rest of your life. As you conduct interviews, read academic articles, and synthesize your findings, hold what you're learning close and let it shape you. The process will enrich your life and challenge you for years after the research is concluded.

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