

Employment of Students in a University Library's Publishing Unit

A Case Study

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Abstract

Using student reflections, office data, and academic literature, this case study of a university library's publishing unit highlights how an intentionally designed, student-based work environment can serve both students and institutional goals. At the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt, student assistants work in paraprofessional publishing positions that deliver mentorship opportunities, hands-on experience, and transferable skills in publishing workflows and project management. This employment model aligns with high-impact educational practices that foster student engagement, agency, academic success, and career readiness. The press also benefits from the student-based operations, allowing it to expand its services, increase visibility, drive innovation, and attract external funding. Despite ethical considerations and operational challenges related to student labor, the press demonstrates how student-centered employment can transform both individual student trajectories and institutional capacity.

Keywords

student employment, student engagement, paraprofessional employment, student success, higher education, library publishing

Introduction

The inflation-adjusted cost of attending public college has skyrocketed since the early 1980s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023), putting increasing pressure on students to work while going to school. Statistics from the Penn Wharton Budget Model (2021) show those working students are at a competitive disadvantage, achieving lower grades and staying in school longer than their non-working peers. However, the impact of student employment on academic performance and post-graduation success remains debated in academic circles because of the variable impacts of different employment contexts. This account of student employment at the Press at Poly Humboldt demonstrates the positive impact of one of those contexts: a paraprofessional training ground with a flexible student-oriented environment.

The press operates as a publishing training ground where student assistants gain practical experience in editing, design, and project management, as well as a deeper connection to their academic studies. Instead of being a detriment to student's educational success, the paraprofessional work delivers all the benefits of an educational high-impact practice while diminishing the students' financial burden. By situating educational flexibility, student learning, and skill development at the forefront, the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt nurtures a student employment experience that has elevated career readiness, improved educational engagement, broadened opportunities, and expanded the academic experience for students across the campus.

Using student labor to fill professional positions has required office supervisors to navigate uneven student productivity, manage unrealistic patron expectations, and address ethical considerations about its role in the publishing industry. However, even in this context, student assistants have been an unequivocal boon to the press. They have innovated services by applying their diverse perspectives, knowledge, and skills to the production process. Their labor has increased the number of publishing opportunities, the volume of publishing projects, and the exposure of the campus across the world. Their close working relationships with editors and authors have built strong connections with the community and provided community members a compelling reason to support these student experiences in the press's fundraising efforts.

History of the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt

The Press at Cal Poly Humboldt is a full-service press that publishes high-quality scholarly, intellectual, and creative books and journals by or in support

of the campus and community. To advance the library's mission of information equity, the press does not charge for publication nor demand a percentage of sales, but only requires that all content be published in open access to maximize dissemination and use. Press publications are made available through a search engine optimized Digital Commons platform, which has resulted in downloads across more than 220 countries and territories. Authors retain copyright over their works and have sole control over ebook and print sale royalties. The press supports authors in this regard by facilitating the publication of their works through online print-on-demand services such as Amazon, IngramSpark, and Lulu.

Humboldt State University Press, as it was known prior to a university name change in 2022, launched in 2015 with the release of the children's book, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Kamome*. Existing library staff carved out time to facilitate the press until the summer of 2016, when the library hired a Scholarly Communications Librarian, centering operations into the newly formed Scholarly Communications Office. In November 2016, the library reached a deal with the Graduate Studies Office to move thesis approval management and accessibility/formatting remediation responsibilities to the Scholarly Communications Office in exchange for a student budget. Ever since, the press has been a student-centered training ground for publishing, situating student learning and skill development at the forefront of the operations.¹

An increase in the student budget between 2017–2018 allowed the office to hire a third student assistant. This allowed the office to expand the operations of the institutional repository, the library's open-education program, the graduate thesis approval process, and the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt. The expansion led to greater visibility, increased the number of book and journal submissions, and forced the press to rely heavily on all three student assistants to manage the extra workload.

The Scholarly Communications Librarian's role in the press became a matter of managing the publishing schedule, assigning students projects and backup projects, addressing student questions and obstacles, and maintaining the publishing standards. For their part, student assistants largely worked independently to pick up the necessary technology and

1 The office recruits students through a university job posting platform. Notifications go out to professors in the English Department and Journalism & Mass Communication Department. Students are asked to supply a cover letter and resume, and the top candidates are invited to interview. Students are hired after verification of references and availability.

publishing skills to move projects forward.² Amid this controlled anarchy, the press scrambled to meet accessibility requirements and neglected some publishing best practices such as DOI and ISSN registration. Especially during the first year, meetings with prospective authors seemed to create more questions than deliver answers. Still, during this fake-it-until-you-make-it era, authors and editors expressed satisfaction with their published books and journals and spread the word around campus and the community. Four book publications in 2016, two of them reprints from special collections, grew to ten original books in 2021; four published journal volumes grew to twelve.

Starting in 2019, the press began yearly reviews of students by requiring the submission of a public reflection and a resume for a fictitious publishing job. The reflections showed how the students were thinking about their employment and provided content that could be posted publicly to promote the office's value to administrators and donors. The resumes served primarily to discuss what the student had learned and wanted to achieve for the remainder of their employment. They also helped students consider their current role in context to their work history, career goals, and future projects at the press.

Between 2021–2022, the library added a staff member with a graduate degree in publishing whose duties included part-time support of the press. Under the new supervisory assistance, the press improved its student communications, training, and publication templates. The press reduced production errors and after-the-fact revisions, streamlining student workflows and improving final products.

Literature Review

Despite the statistics correlating student employment with lower academic performance, the academic literature is largely divided on whether student jobs help or hinder academic success (Douglas & Artewell, 2019). The discrepancies are partly due to the type of employment studied. Part-time,

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- 2 Upon hiring, students are given basic design and layout training using Adobe Indesign. Students are then given a test manuscript to typeset, which is reviewed by the Scholarly Communications Librarian with the student present. Upon approval, each student is assigned a relatively simple layout project. No layout manual exists as practices can vary between projects, but each project's goals are discussed with the student before beginning. How students do on these projects determine the complexity of future assigned projects.

flexible jobs promising practical skills related to a student's discipline correlate with improved student success (McNeal, 1997; Body et al., 2014; Neyt, 2017). Supporting these findings, the Mitola et al. (2018) analysis of 216 publications on student employment in academic libraries finds that positions that are relevant to students' career aspirations or that provide them transferable and practical competencies contribute to student retention and academic success.

The literature on the connection between student employment and post-graduation employment success is similarly debated, although with a higher percentage of the studies reporting positive correlations. Many of the articles describe how employment provides students with skills of value in the labor market (Darolia, 2014; Neyt, 2017; Mitola et al., 2018; Lucero, 2022). Bartolj & Polanec (2021) add that student jobs with moderate hours improve the likelihood of students gaining post-graduate employment, especially if the student job requires highly skilled work related to the students' career aspirations. Douglas and Attewell (2019, 11) finds that student employees earn higher wages upon graduation, reporting a correlation "as strong as that associated with completing a degree."

Undergraduate research opportunities in which a student volunteers, interns, or works in a professional laboratory, comprise one well-researched example of such career-specific work environments. The Sadler et al. (2010) analysis of 53 science apprenticeship programs found that promoting career aspirations in the sciences is one of the most frequently reported benefits of undergraduate research programs. Real-world student participation in research laboratories allow students to develop the skills necessary to become a research professional (Lopatto, 2007; Russell, 2007; Thiry, 2011; Howell, 2019). Studies also demonstrate that such opportunities enhance the educational experiences of students and convey vast positive impacts for student learning and development, including in cognitive measures such as critical thinking and problem solving (Pascarella, 1991; Seymour, 2004; Hunter, 2006; Kilgo, 2015). Mentorship is also widely cited as a benefit of undergraduate research, even across different types of mentorship structures (Shanahan, 2015; Haeger, 2016; Aikens, 2016). Although less has been written on peer-to-peer or near-to-peer mentorships, those articles demonstrate benefits to both mentor and mentee alike (Adeywardana, 2020; Tennenbaum, 2014). Because of these benefits and others addressed in Kuh's 2008 article on high-impact teaching and learning practices, the American Association of Colleges and Universities (n.d.) identifies undergraduate research as one of eleven high-impact educational practices, while Kilgo (2015) identifies undergraduate research as one of the two most high-impact practices because of the expansive benefits it confers to students.

While scant literature speaks specifically to the student benefits of student-facilitated publishing, the benefits gained by student editors of journals—an endeavor closely aligned to the responsibilities and skill sets required of student publishing employment—are well documented. Practicing student editors improve their scholarly communications and open-access literacy, writing and research skills, critical thinking, practical publishing skills, leadership and agency, post-graduate employment advantages, and project management, all the while cultivating their academic identity and pride (Alexander, 2016; Arsenault et al., 2021; Bauer, 2009; Busher & Kamotsky, 2015; Cox, 2018; Dawson and Marken, 2019; Gilman, 2013; Hare, 2019; Koskinen, 2021; Lujano, 2023; Mariani, 2013; Spiro, 2015; Syeda, 2017; Weiner & Watkinson, 2014; Wojturska, 2022). The Ng et al. (2017) cross-sectional survey of 26 student STEM journals generally confirms the benefits to student editors, while Barrios and Weber (2006) depict the benefits of student editor positions as surpassing that of student authorship, including the opportunity of student editors to obtain jobs after graduation.

Two sets of authors have published frameworks to gauge the effectiveness of student employment experiences in academic libraries. Mitola et al. (2018) uses George Kuh's six characteristics of high-impact practices as a framework to evaluate published studies on student employment in academic libraries. The researchers found that library student employment consistently aligns with the high-impact characteristics of faculty peer involvement and purposeful time and effort, but recommended areas for development regarding a commitment to diversity, student feedback, transferable skills and knowledge, and connection to communities. Tomlinson & Arnold-Garza (2022) uses the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSEE) as a framework for academic libraries to evaluate the engagement of student employment experiences, identifying measures regarding the capacity of a student job to advance critical thinking, self-reflection, active participation, evidence-based decision making, collaborative problem solving, mentorship, variable interactions, supportive creativity and innovation, meaningful experiences, and challenging tasks.

Student Benefits

The Press at Cal Poly Humboldt provides a student-centric employment environment meant to enhance students' college experience. Most students work between 10-15 hours per week, ensuring moderate workloads. Flexible scheduling allows students to add and retract hours depending on school pressures or personal challenges. Students of the English and Journalism

& Mass Communication Departments, who constitute the majority of the press's employees, gain experience and knowledge related to their career interests in publishing. However, even the few employees who envision no career in publishing still gain real-world experience and transferable skills in scholarly communications workflows, project management, verbal and written communications, and critical thinking valuable to post-graduate futures in academia and the general workforce. One student assistant, L.P., echoed this sentiment: "I've been thinking of ways I can incorporate what I've learned into my profession as a future teacher. I'd love to give students the opportunity to be able to publish their very own works."

“Thank you, the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt... for proving to me that I made the right choice to build my career in publishing. You believed in me from the start, and I now have a resume with the experience to prove you right.”

—A.G., STUDENT ASSISTANT REFLECTION

The positive career impact of the press' employment experience is supported by the nineteen student assistant and intern reflections collected from 2019 to 2024.³ Of those, eighteen reflections spoke specifically to the skills they gained during their employment and their expectation that it would help them professionally after graduation, and one student reflection stated that the employment was the student's first paid publishing work, implying that it could be the springboard to future work in the field.

Because the press accepts a wide variety of publications, including journals, textbooks, manuals, academic monographs, conference proceedings, nonfiction

3 Please see the appendices for samples of all 19 student reflections and for two complete student reflection examples. Note that these reflections, as approved by the students, are the sole basis of this article's view of student perceptions and no informal communications have been collected or used. The perceptions and experiences of the author and press staff have been detailed to provide as full of an account as possible as to the benefits and drawbacks of student employment at the press.

trade, fiction, poetry, and children's books, students develop wide skill sets in editing, layout, publishing, and marketing. A student assistant may find themselves moving from designing a children's book to editing a memoir to managing a peer-reviewed journal, each project necessitating different skills, project management duties, and communications to students, faculty, community members, reviewers, collaborators, or platform vendors. These challenges build upon the skills learned before, heightening engagement and furthering career potentials to the benefit of a student's entire university experience. As student assistant M.H. reflected: "... [after my first year] I was seriously considering dropping out... [then] I happened across HSU Press." Three years later, M.H. left the university with a degree and a resume populated for post-graduation success (see Appendix C to view a sample student assistant resume).

The diversity of projects allows students the agency to select those that will develop areas of most benefit to their professional aspirations. As student assistants advance their skills, many become collaborators on publishing projects, further empowering their voices. Student assistant collaborators routinely inject new ideas and possibilities into publishing projects, occasionally deciding a publication direction different than that recommended by their supervisor. Student assistant D.W. marveled on the uniqueness of such agency when she stated that the press "gave me opportunities to be seen and heard in ways I did not expect as a student employee."

Many of the press's publication projects involve environmental, DEI, and social justice issues. Student involvement with meaningful real-world projects elevates their engagement and pride in their work. Student assistant K.D. reflected that she actually cried when her book project was completed: "I was so proud to have my name in such an amazing and influential book. I'll never forget that feeling."

As students engage in different projects, they occasionally surprise their supervisors with previously unknown talents. One student who had been a decent employee during their first year in the office requested an opportunity to expand their editorial experience. The Scholarly Communications Librarian tasked the student with evaluating a new submission, only expecting the project to provide the student with another learning opportunity. Instead, the student wrote an incredibly insightful and astute developmental edit. Since students usually have limited editorial experience, the supervisors will revise student edits before delivering them to the author. However, in this case, the quality of the edit led the Scholarly Communications Librarian to email the evaluation intact to the author and to introduce the student so that the author and student could collaborate directly on the project. After graduating, the

student continued to work with the author and helped develop the manuscript into a quality draft, which was later accepted for publication by the press.

In another case, a student designed and typeset one of the more important books in the press's catalog. The Scholarly Communications Librarian approved the design and layout, but before he could finalize the work for publication, the student had an epiphany and begged to redo the design. She had learned so much from the initial layout that she now had a plan on how she wanted to upgrade the design. The librarian considered the redesign unnecessary and an inefficient use of time, but since the student's name would go in the book as the designer, the decision was hers. The resulting redesign dramatically improved the look of the book, delighted the authors, demonstrated the full skill set of the student, and became a flagship publication in the press's catalog.

In rare occasions, the student talent that emerges is not confined to a particular area but showcases the entirety of their abilities. When the acting managing editor of a national peer-reviewed journal dropped out early in the project, one of the press's student assistants had to be recruited to stabilize the workflow and keep the journal on track. Working remotely, the student assistant quickly got up to speed on the status of the project, read all the submissions, and added insightful reviews to the editorial team's evaluations. Unintimidated by the faculty editorial team and authors, she took over author communications and scheduling, kept and updated meeting notes and agendas, established a calendar with benchmarks for each of the articles, and interviewed particular faculty that the editors wanted included in the journal. The student assistant then proofed, designed, typeset, and published the journal, integrating each editor's recommendations at every step of the process. Impressed with her work, the editorial team gathered the funds to pay for the student to fly to campus to be honored at the journal release event.

As this example demonstrates, student assistants at the press benefit not only from mentorship from their supervisors, but also from the authors and editors they work with. Because authors and editors work with student assistants on projects so close to their hearts, they can build strong connections. Authors and editors frequently single out student assistants in their presentations and include them in their acknowledgments. For their part, students have used those authors and editors as references and for written letters of recommendation.

Thirteen of the nineteen student assistant and intern reflections addressed the supportive environment at the office, noting the collaborative atmosphere and/or mentorship experience. This speaks as much to the students' relationships with their coworkers as with the supervisors in the office. When a student assistant advances in their publishing skills and knowledge, they become *de facto*

mentors to the other students in the office. The supervisors have recognized that students often feel more comfortable asking questions of their peers. As the trust among the students evolves, they even explore projects outside of the press. Student assistant C.D. noted how she became friends with her coworkers from the press and how they began to work together to “bring our personal and professional projects, including zines, short films, and photography, to fruition.”

Student assistants have also become mentors to prospective authors, especially to fellow students who are publishing their first pieces. Whether the student assistants partake in editing, design, layout, or final publication, they take pride in working with student authors to bring the best out in their works. Student assistant K.S. reported that “Some of my favorite moments working for the press were times I got to chat with [student] authors for *ideaFest Journal*, especially towards the end of the editing process when I could see their excitement in getting published. It was such an honor to contribute to the publication of so many students’ works and to be able to read so many interesting articles along the way.”

Press, Library, and Campus Benefits

Donors and the student connection

One of the benefits for supervisors and patrons in student-facilitated offices is the opportunity to work with students. Supervisors build close connections with their student assistants, and editors and authors routinely express pleasure with working so closely with the press’ student assistants. An employee at another university press once questioned how the press manages the criticisms of authors and editors expecting professional work with student-based staffing, but that has yet to be an issue. In fact, the students have been a boon to community relations, advocacy, and donations.⁴

One author worked with a single student assistant across four of his publications, building a strong rapport between them. The author glowed about the student in his acknowledgments and provided the student with an unsolicited recommendation letter for future employment applications. The author also made a sizable contribution to support student internships at the

4 While student staff received praises from authors directly in their publication acknowledgements and via presentations, the press has not implemented a regular study of author perceptions. While publication counts and author donations were used to represent author satisfaction in this paper, a plan for post-publication outreach services in the future should provide a fuller picture of author perspectives.

press, before making the biggest pledge to the university in its history, to be split among the press, special collections, and a community educational program (Documenting the Past and Preserving the Future, 2022). While the donation aligned with many of the author's valued causes, his close bond with the student assistant at the press certainly contributed to his wish that his donation provide continued student opportunities at the press and special collections.

As of 2024, 50% of the authors who published books through the press earmarked their print sales royalties to nonprofit organizations, including to the library to support internships at the press.⁵ Eight authors donated \$500 to \$1000 directly to support student internships after publishing with the press. Of the eight, seven continued to donate to the library. Two authors who had already donated to the library gave exclusively and more regularly after publication of their works. Three authors also gave gift cards directly to the student assistants who worked on their projects.

Capacity, marketing, and student opportunities

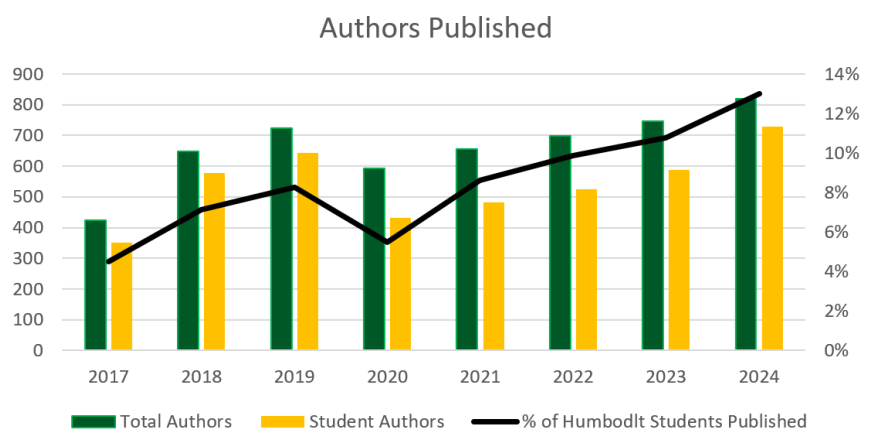
Student labor has brought greater publishing capacity to the press. In the press' first year, largely without student assistance, the press published a combined total of eight journal volumes and monographs. From 2020 to 2024, with a full student cohort, the press has averaged twenty combined journal volumes and monograph titles per year.

Student assistants have also facilitated the expansion of the Scholarly Communication Office's non-press, digital postings of student research posters, graduate theses, senior capstones, and faculty open educational resources. Because of student assistant support and increased efficiencies in the office, the total number of people with content posted through the Scholarly Communications Office has increased on average 9% every year from 2020 to 2024. The expansion of published authors has particularly impacted student authorship, as student authors constitute the majority of the posted works (see figure 1). This expansion has been all the more remarkable considering it occurred across a period of reductions in student enrollment at the university.

5 The Press uses internships only minimally. Since student assistants can take months to become contributors to press operations, most semester-long internships provide limited benefits to the press. Prior to 2025, library internship donations were the only means to provide monetary support that might be accessed by the press. A 2025 fundraising campaign has helped establish a specific press account with more flexible spending parameters.

Figure 1

Total authors published on the Humboldt Digital Commons platform by the Scholarly Communications Office. The chart also shows the portion of total published authors who are students and the percentage of students enrolled at the university who have published content on the platform. The data was compiled via a chronologically organized analysis of authors on a Digital Commons report of published content measured against yearly Cal Poly Humboldt enrollment numbers.



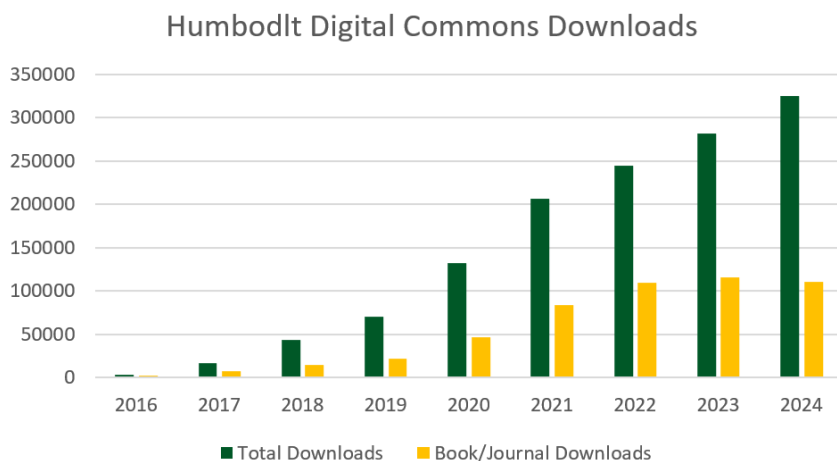
A number of the press’s authors speak in classrooms, at campus events, and in the community, improving the educational experience for all students and community members. For example, the collaborative publication *Oaxaca y más allá, microrelatos bilingües del corazón* brought Oaxacan authors to campus for a three-day schedule of events that included multiple classroom and community engagements. The bilingual author readings reached a diverse audience including campus students, professors, and administrators; high school students; and Humboldt County’s Latinx community members. The integration of all these participants increased cultural awareness and forged ties between different areas on campus, between the campus and local communities, between local communities, and between communities in the US and Mexico. In another example, the Betty Chinn memoir release event on campus, which spotlighted the work of a local activist for the houseless, drew over 60 people and inspired a collaboration with the nursing program to improve community mental health. Her community book release event in an adjacent town drew nearly

400 people in one the area's largest book release events in recent history.

The increased capacity of the Scholarly Communications Office has also been a marketing boon for the Cal Poly Humboldt campus. As of the end of 2024, press books and journal publications have been downloaded over 500,000 times, with 23 percent of the downloads occurring in the last twelve months. When the entire breadth of the Scholarly Communications Office online postings is compiled, the total reaches 1.3 million, with 25 percent of the downloads occurring in the last twelve months (see figure 2). Each download comes with a cover page publicizing not only the title and author of the work, but the university and platform responsible for its publication. This kind of direct marketing raises the awareness and stature of the press, library, and university across the world.⁶ With close to 20 percent of the downloads coming from within California, the content is also raising the university's profile among university colleagues, tax paying residents, and possibly prospective students.

Figure 2

Total downloads across the institutional repository and the portion of those downloads that come from the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt's books and journals. The data was compiled via a chronologically organized analysis of a Digital Commons report of content downloaded from the platform.



6 To avoid duplicating counts, the download numbers do not take into account approximately 427,000 page hits and 5,000 books sold on Amazon, IngramSpark, Lulu, and local bookstores from 2016 to 2024.

Office innovation

As each graduating class is followed by a cohort of new enrollments, an infusion of new student employees consistently refreshes the office, each of them in some small way impacting how the press operates. Each student assistant brings their own views and opinions to every project they work on, bouncing ideas off coworkers and supervisors to shape their vision of the projects within the constraints of established best practices. These ideas can occasionally ignite office-wide discussions about the authority of editors and production assistants as well as if and how to broach controversial subjects with authors. Often, a student assistant's success in getting authors or editors to buy into their vision comes down to students honing their ideas and arguments beforehand and anticipating criticisms at the onset. The result is an invaluable project management experience for the students and a continual refreshing of the look of the press's publications.

New student assistants bring skills and experiences that can also allow the press to innovate and explore new directions. Students with connections to various clubs or classes can provide bridges to new projects. Students with experience in and a passion for multimedia can supplement a publication's marketing efforts with author interviews. Students adept in social media can promote publications across multiple platforms. Students with foreign language skills can assist in foreign language publications and translate works to make them available to a broader audience. The only limit to the ways students can be leveraged to benefit operations, and how the job can be leveraged to benefit student development, is the imagination of the supervisor.

Drawbacks

While the literature depicts mostly positive student experiences within student-facilitated journals, some have noted the challenges of such operations. Student-facilitated journals can struggle from high turnover rates, busy student schedules, and dwindling interest over time (Thawani, 2013; Syeda, 2017; Ho, 2011; O'Donnell et al., 2018). Projects with insufficient training resources; inconsistent faculty, departmental, or professional support; a lack of editorial funding; or an absence of curricular integration can struggle to survive from year to year (Ho, 2011; Beatty, 2013; Mariani et al., 2013; Cowan, 2013; Gilman, 2013; Syeda, 2017; O'Donnell et al., 2018). In those operations that do provide student funding, as noted in the Nelson & Thoms 2021 analysis

of students in a scholarly communications office, student assistants need to see the broader context and value of their work to achieve higher engagement and involvement.

Student-facilitated operations also suffer from the constraints of the labor pool. Students are part-time employees with limited hours to give. Their schedules fluctuate, leaving unpredictable gaps, especially during finals and school breaks. Their priorities place school first and employment second, and they will reduce their hours or leave a position if the demands of school, extracurricular participation, and employment become too daunting.

For the press, the constant student turnover means dedicating extra time and resources to hiring and training. This includes time spent on updating job descriptions, notifying pertinent faculty regarding openings, posting jobs, vetting applications, interviewing students, and steering them through human resources requirements and payroll setup. Once hired, the press can spend months getting students familiar with the complexities of press processes, standards, and software. Getting students to the level of project collaborators can take one to two years.

Complicating matters, an office can never really anticipate what kind of student assistant a new hire will become. Most students, but especially younger candidates, come with such little work experience or professional references that properly evaluating their potential is not feasible. The brief 45-minute interview does little to clarify the picture. If an office only has the budget for one student and that student ends up being of minimal relative assistance, that can affect office productivity for the extent of their employment. Students unfamiliar with office employment or who may have developed unproductive work habits from a previous employment may require additional managerial time and intervention regarding office expectations.

Students can often bring a homework assignment mentality to their work. That is, they will turn in “good-enough” projects rife with errors and inconsistencies. This can result in what seems like an eternal loop of supervisory edits and student resubmissions. The press supervisors frequently have to resist the urge to finish a project themselves in lieu of educating the student to the higher standard of professional work life.

The unpredictability of student schedules, productivity, and abilities means that book and journal publications move slowly and sporadically. Trying to organize projects on fixed schedules is all but impossible. The press regularly surprises prospective authors with vague year-long production estimates for relatively straightforward projects, just to better plan for the unpredictable. Active author involvement causes additional delays, with authors able to

request edits and design changes up to the date of publication. Long publication schedules might require a change in the student assistant working on the project, further extending the publication timeline.

While students can mimic the design or layout of professionally published works, this mimicry cannot be extrapolated to editorial skill. Lacking the time and resources for proper training, the press relies on the editorial skills a student already brings to the job, with little expectation of substantial improvement. Even those students who demonstrate editorial acumen may struggle with editorial confidence. Editing an article, especially if the author is a revered faculty member, involves a shift in power dynamics that many students can struggle with.

Over the first years of the press, student independence led to inadvisable shortcuts and a lack of effective planning, leading to issues further down the production schedule. For example, when a student manually created an unbroken string of chapter endnotes (i.e., they were not automated and did not reset at the beginning of each chapter), a small revision at the beginning of the book necessitated the manual renumbering of all 1,828 in-text references and endnotes. A lack of planning for accessibility requirements and ebook production has caused similar issues, requiring the reformatting of many pre-2022 publications.

Fortunately, the addition of supervisory support in 2021 allowed the press to be more intentional in initial training, project onboarding, student communication, and the use of preformatted templates, which incorporated the requirements of ebook production, accessibility requirements, and proper practices at the onset of the project. Getting students back into the office after the COVID pandemic also improved the early detection of layout errors.

The supervisory support also helped alleviate the managerial isolation, stress, and exhaustion from the early years of the press. Since the press's projects lack a fixed schedule or benchmarks, there is no way to gauge student productivity except through time-intensive oversight. As each project is unique, it is difficult to know if a student assistant is struggling with their work, or if the issue is with the project itself. In addition, with only one supervisor, all project troubleshooting lands on that supervisor's desk, regardless of the supervisor's ability and availability to answer. Big problems, such as computer failures, can necessitate an overhaul of every student's duties until the lack of computing workspace is resolved. When problems coalesce against a rare production deadline, the supervisor does not have the luxury of the all-night team efforts that tend to occur in professional presses

and may need to push through extended hours alone under less-than-ideal mental capacities.

Ethical considerations

As of 2014, five major publishers dominate the United States publishing market. The capital, resources, and connections at the disposal of these conglomerates make it difficult for smaller independent publishers to survive (Moran, 1997; Ramdarshan Bold, 2016, 2017; Berlinger, 2023). Operating a community-publishing press like the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt under the support of a library, without the need to turn a profit, only adds additional competition to those independent publishers.

Employing students for professional-level work also undermines the market for professional skilled labor. It denigrates the work of professional staff by implying that students can adequately fill the gap in publishing services. The press employs two publishing professionals to oversee student operations, and while they maintain a high bar for publication, the student-based workforce cannot match the expertise of a fully staffed professional press.

The press is upfront with every prospective author and editor that publication operations function as a training ground for students. Flexible, part-time student labor extends publishing timelines. Students can mimic layouts but are limited in their ability to create wholly original designs. Students can proof manuscripts but are limited in their ability to deliver professional-level copyediting.

However, by managing expectations from the start, the press has found its niche. A flexible schedule with no production deadline means that authors can be involved in every step of the layout, editorial, and marketing processes, providing them a voice that is atypical in the rigid publication schedules of professional publishers. While many independent publishers have had to employ a pay-for-play funding model to survive, the press's library support means those without financial means still have an opportunity to publish. Books that require color interiors, include open-educational content, or are intended for non-profit fundraising are especially difficult to publish at traditional presses due to their low-royalty potential and licensing complications. By publishing digitally using Creative Commons licenses, the press can successfully publish such works and help authors find their audience.

The press's largest donor tried for years to support an independent publishing house for local authors but lacked the time and capital to do so. Funding the

press has become his way of locking in publishing support for the community in perpetuity. The press's free publishing model, author friendly agreements, encouragement of author involvement, integration of student employees, and prioritization of a publication's value over capitalistic potential aligned well with his vision, and that of many of our authors, of what a press should be.

Rather than competing, the press views its role as an advocate not just for authors, but for local publishing services. Especially for those authors prioritizing commercial success, the press steers such authors towards self-publishing and professional publishing services. The press regularly refers authors to professional editorial and typeset services and has collaborated with a local commercial publishing house on multiple publications. Like every other service at the library, the press aims to support its patrons' goals, regardless of whether those goals ultimately include the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt.

Discussion

The employment experience at the Press at Cal Poly Humboldt benefits students academically. In alignment with George Kuh's six characteristics of educational high-impact practices, the press environment provides students with faculty peer involvement, purposeful time and effort, a commitment to diversity, regular feedback, transferable skills and knowledge, and a connection to their communities (Mitola et al., 2018). In alignment with Tomlinson & Arnold-Garza's (2022) framework of engagement measures, the employment directly engages critical thinking, self-reflection, active participation, evidence-based decision making, collaborative problem solving, mentorship, variable interactions, supportive creativity and innovation, meaningful experiences, and challenging tasks.

Thiry et al. (2011) asserts that student engagement in high-quality, real-world experiences that align with students' interests and career goals is integral for students who want to become professionals in the field. While Thiry is speaking of the high-impact practice of undergraduate research experiences, she could easily have been addressing the kind of paraprofessional work offered at the press. Both provide students with course-aligned educational enrichment, mentorships, cognitive stimulation, career focus, and the skills to be successful in that career. The student reflections speak to how students view the educational and career advantages of working at the press, mirroring the reports of students participating in undergraduate research experiences.

“[The press] instills a level of trust with employees to carry out work assignments independently. I have had several jobs as a student, both in undergraduate and graduate school, and have yet to come upon this balance of guidance and independence as a student employee... [It] shifts employment as a student from somewhat of a burden to an opportunity for limitless skill development and learning.”

—C.D., STUDENT ASSISTANT REFLECTION

Managing students is messy; relying on them for operations even more so. Ethical considerations, unrealistic patron expectations, and uneven work production and schedules are among the many challenges when relying on student labor. Yet when these issues are openly addressed with prospective authors and supporters, instead of shunning the press, they seem to gain a greater respect and appreciation for the press's goals. Student assistants bring diversity, innovation, and new ideas into press projects. For the university, they add capacity to operations that deliver campus-wide educational opportunities, stimulate fundraising efforts, and facilitate community outreach and impact. At a time when higher education is struggling to communicate its value, the student-based operations at the press have connected the Humboldt campus to its local community, empowered the voices of both, and served the goal of the university to provide transformational educational experiences for its students.

Conclusion

Constructing experiences that benefit students takes time and intentionality. Even high-impact practices such as undergraduate research have detrimental

effects when students are taxed with inadequate supervision, mundane tasks, a lack of ownership over duties, and limited opportunities to work independently or creatively (Thiry et al., 2011). The same is true with student employment. If higher education is to serve its goal of providing transformational educational experiences, student employment on campus needs to be reconceived to provide the greatest benefit to the employee, rather than to the employer.

The Mitola et al. (2018) and Tomlinson & Arnold-Garza (2022) frameworks of a pro-student work environment are easy to understand, yet difficult to implement. They require additional efforts on behalf of campus supervisors and investment in supervisor training and support. However, by constructing campus employment in this way, higher education can deliver student experiences that not only supports students' financial well-being, but their educational success and professional growth. Statistics show how student employment negatively impacts student success; however, when facilitated as a student-oriented, paraprofessional training ground, student jobs can weave together a student's curriculum and professional ambition to engage, inspire, and launch students toward their dream lives. Like a well-constructed undergraduate research experience, well-constructed student employment should be viewed as a high-impact practice with the potential to improve student engagement and retention across higher education.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Quotes from student reflections

What follows are quotes from the reflections of the 19 student assistants and interns who worked at the press starting in 2019.

My experience with HSU press continues to strengthen my abilities as a writer, editor, designer and professional, and my confidence in bringing these skills out into the world after my time at HSU.

—A.L.

I feel strongly that my short time working with [HSU Press] gave me a great advantage in applying for later jobs... and getting me my dream job....

—D.W.

[Author 1 first name] instilled in me a passion for publication design that I did not know I had. My time in the Scholarly Communications office has expanded my career opportunities beyond graduation...

—C.D.

I was unaware of how complex a librarian's job could be and how absolutely pivotal they are to not only our campus but the greater Humboldt community as a whole.

—E.A.

...this internship provided a positive, non-judgmental space for me to step out of my comfort zone and do real-world work in university publishing.

—M.H.

The skills I learned were essential for [getting my position at the Library of Congress].

—A.A.

...the press has changed the trajectory of my career and showed me the type of work environment (and work!) I want while applying for and accepting jobs in the future.

—S.G.

The skills and new knowledges that I have practiced and produced this semester I am positive will help me in my professional future.

—K.E.

Working in HSU Press, I've been thinking of ways I can incorporate what I've learned into my profession as a future teacher. I'd love to give students the opportunity to be able to publish their very own works... I think it's important that the world hears more from our future scholars.

—L.P.

This job, the people, and the skills it both bolstered and created in me will hold a place in my heart as the one that got me one step closer to my dream job as a professional editor.

—K.S.

The opportunity of HSU Press has set me miles ahead of my peers in preparation for what is to come after I leave Humboldt State behind.

—M.H.

Working at the press was always a great part of my day at Cal Poly Humboldt and helped instill the confidence I now have to continue working towards a career in publishing.

—T.B.

All of these skills strengthened my resume and my confidence in myself in pursuing a publishing career going forward.

—K.D.

Working for the press afforded me so many wonderfully unique opportunities and experiences that I will bring with me into my career.

—A.G.

[After a visit by the press team to my class], I decided I wanted to be a part of a team that would help me grow not only academically but also professionally.

—T.G.

My time at the press stands out from all other experiences I've had with past employers in that it not only informed and developed my technical skills, but also let me enjoy and be actively engaged in the work I was doing there.

—L.H.

My time at the press was a valuable experience in learning how a career in publishing would look like.

—K.O.

Working for the press for the majority of the three years that I attended Cal Poly Humboldt has broadened my experience in publishing and my connections within the industry and strengthened my confidence in myself and my professional skills.

—C.D.

My biggest takeaway from working at the press was realizing I never wanted to leave.... but when I did, I would have advantages I hadn't been able to have before.

—C.W.

Appendix B: Sample student reflections

Sample student reflection #1

They say that Augustus found Rome a city of rubble and left it a city of marble and, in much the same way I feel as though HSU Press has changed me. I came to Humboldt State University in the fall of 2018 a destitute freshman believing I had no prospects; I was so unbelieving that my chosen major, English, would yield me any true opportunity for a job that I was seriously considering dropping out at the end of my first year.

Before that could happen, and much to my great fortune, I happened to come across HSU Press, and though I had no experience to speak of at all in the field of publishing, I managed to land a job. Little did I know at the time, but this was the beginning of what I have more or less decided to be my career.

Introductory jobs made available to college students is something I know should be common practice. Learning of theory in a classroom is all well and good, but without practical experience, graduates are under prepared to enter the workforce or their specified industry. I myself know that the opportunity of HSU Press has set me miles ahead of my peers in preparation for what is to come after I leave Humboldt State behind.

Sample student reflection #2

The Press at Cal Poly Humboldt was my first work experience within the publishing industry and working as a student assistant allowed me to experience some of the various sectors within this industry. I now have hands-on experience in different levels of the editing process, worked with industry standard software, enhanced my communication and managerial skills, conducted administrative tasks within an institutional repository, and have a better understanding of the publishing workflow from an academic publisher perspective. I worked under the supportive leadership of Sarah and [[Author 1 first name]], and was always encouraged to ask questions, develop, and share my opinions on projects, and explore my interests within the various publishing projects we had on task. This experience was very valuable for my professional development and aspirations. Working at the press was always a great part of my day at Cal Poly Humboldt and helped instill the confidence I now have to continue working towards a career in publishing. I am proud to have been a part of the team at the press, and work towards its mission as well as working within the campus community.

Appendix C: Anonymous student resume

Student Publishing Assistant: March 2019 – May 2022

- Reviewed graduate theses for formatting, style guide, and ADA compliance.
- Managed projects and author relations for book publications.
- Conducted developmental editing, line editing, and copyediting on nonfiction and fiction publications.
- Designed, formatted, and typeset publications using Adobe InDesign.
- Edited digital objects in Adobe Photoshop
- Conducted interviews for contributors to student journals
- Edited video in Adobe Premiere Pro and Camtasia, including adding closed captions
- Entered data and edited metadata in Microsoft Excel and Digital Commons
- Published ebook in Amazon Kindle

Publishing credits

- African Masks of Burkina Faso and Mali: Trilingual Edition, 2019. Cover and Interior Layout and Design for Print and Digital. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/3/>
- Far Less, 2020. Interior Layout and Design for Print, Digital, and ebook. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/fiction/6/>
- Growland, 2020. Interior Layout and Design for Print, Digital, and ebook. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/fiction/7/>
- *Peacekeepers*, 2021. Copyeditor. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/fiction/9/>
- Humboldt Bay Shoreline North Eureka to South Arcata: A History of Cultural Influences, 2021. Interior/Cover Layout and Design for Print and Digital Publication. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/10/>
- Southern Humboldt Indians, 2021. Interior/Cover Layout

- and Design for Print and Digital Publication. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/14/>
- ✦ Southeast Humboldt Hinterlands, 2022. Interior/Cover Layout and Design for Print and Digital Publication. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/16/>
 - ✦ Southwest Humboldt Hinterlands, 2022. Interior/Cover Layout and Design for Print and Digital Publication. <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/monographs/17/>