

Vital Voices

The Student Journal Symposium for Literary and Research Publications

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Student publications are a vital element of the research ecosystem. Experience with a student-led journal can inspire young people to pursue a career in publishing, instill valuable leadership lessons, and nurture best practices in scholarly communication for students in any field of study.

The 2nd [Student Journal Symposium for Literary and Research Publications](#), demonstrated these values and created community among student-led journals who gathered at the George Washington University and online, May 1-2, 2025. We heard from 73 undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, administrators, academic librarians, and publishing professionals, who collectively represented 34 undergraduate and graduate student journals from 28 universities in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Students, faculty, librarians, and others involved in research at the undergraduate and graduate level, creative and literary magazines and presses, and journals engaged in surprisingly diverse topics shared their experiences and best practices. Journals at the symposium publish topics such as law, science,



medicine, international affairs, public health, political science, public policy, philosophy, history, religious studies, Spanish and Portuguese, curriculum and education, creative writing, Women's studies, community development, language and literacy education, and ethics in publishing.

For students who publish in these journals, the experience may lead to graduate school or professional opportunities. Students editing and publishing journals learn valuable leadership experience in addition to copyediting, design, and technology skills. Faculty advisors, library publishers, and other staff gain experience and service opportunities. A few student journals make an impact on their discipline, beyond their campus. The Symposium provides a space to share best practices on funding, sustainability, leadership, and peer review as we navigate through a challenging time for research, academic freedom, and higher education.

We also hope that the Symposium might encourage students who lead or contribute to these journals to consider a career in publishing. Most students involved in student-led journals pursue these opportunities due to interest in the topic or in getting involved in honors or other extracurricular activities, and a few student journals also comprise a for-credit course. But students are not necessarily thinking of publishing, and in particular scholarly publishing, as a career choice. The Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) has sponsored the Symposium from its inception, due to its alignment with the association's early career initiatives and priorities.

Support for Student Journal Programs

Undergraduate- and graduate-level research journals and literary journals are published at many universities, with direct support by the university or independently funded. Key issues include sustainability, and continuity of these

journals when students graduate or faculty advisors depart. Existing support for student journals varies. Previously, no national organization or conference focused exclusively on student journals existed in the United States. The Library Publishing Coalition (LPC) includes members who provide support for student journals, the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) includes a community of interest group for student journals, and the Community of Literary Magazine and Presses (CLMP) includes as members some student literary journals. Simon Fraser's PKP School provides online resources for faculty and student-led journals and supports Canada's annual [Student Journal Forum](#), which celebrated its 10th year in 2025.

I conceived the Student Journal Symposium recognizing the need and opportunity for creating dialogue and community around student-led journals. Student journals often launch with a flurry of energy, passion, and talent, but it's rare indeed for these publications to achieve sustainability and consistency for five years or more. Even long-established student journals can abruptly teeter and cease operations after the departing of a long-time faculty adviser, or an unfortunate leadership transition. Student journals face similar issues and challenges, yet there is infrequent dialogue among student journals, even at the same university. While operating at a different scale from professional scholarly journals, the challenges they face as well as the opportunities for impact are remarkably comparable.

As a pilot project and proof of concept, our inaugural symposium, held April 26, 2024, focused on literary and research journals focused on the DC metro area. Two GW undergraduate honors students, **Jaylee Davis** and **Amelia Nason**, and GW Publishing graduate student **Dominique McIndoe**, collaborated with me to develop the first Symposium, researching the community of student literary and research journals, inviting panelists, and moderating sessions. Our first Symposium exceeded our expectations, with sixteen speakers from eight student-led journals from American, Howard, Maryland, and George Washington universities. The first Symposium received a Silver award in the category of Publishing Education and Training Initiatives at SSP's [Epic Awards](#), during the 2025 Annual Meeting.

My interest in student-led journals and their role in the publishing ecosystem has emerged over several years. I was not aware of student journals, if they existed at all, as an undergraduate student in Spanish and Portuguese at UC Santa Barbara in the early 1980s, nor as a graduate student in international management at UC San Diego in the late 1980s. As Marketing Director for Georgetown University Press (2012-2014), I assisted in creating a distribution partnership with the student-managed *Georgetown Journal of International*

Affairs, a journal now published and distributed by Johns Hopkins University Press on behalf of Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, and available through Project Muse. As founding director of the George Mason University Press, from 2014-2018, we supported several student journals via our publishing services arm, and I served as a LPC Board Member and author of the LPC's Curriculum Impact module.

A key inspiration for the Student Journal Symposium has been dialogue among LPC colleagues, and the research conducted on the student journal landscape in the United States by **Merinda Hensley**, a dual speaker at this year's Symposium, who with **Heidi Johnson** conducted [research](#) on and compiled a [database](#) of student journals in 2014-2015. Hensley and Johnson identified more than 400 student journals across the United States, and compiled detailed information on ~280 student journals, mostly scholarly but including some literary journals.

GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

As Director of GW's Publishing program, I founded the [GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing](#) (GWJEP), in 2020, as an open-access journal managed by students in the Master of Professional Studies (MPS) in Publishing program. Our goal is to publish student capstone work on ethics in publishing alongside scholarly articles and other publications by other publishing and library scholars, students, and professionals, and to provide our students with hands-on experience in managing a professional journal that will prove useful for their career prospects. As a part of coursework, I worked with students to develop peer review guidelines and launch the journal as a Diamond Open Access model. Inaugural Editor-in-Chief Randy Townsend, and, since 2022, EIC Lois Jones, have led student committees, which now include Editorial, E-Publishing, Marketing, Strategy and Sustainability, and Content. We have sought to involve the scholarly publishing community as authors, peer reviewers, and advisors. The journal has led to positive outcomes for students searching for their first opportunities in the publishing field, is sponsored by the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP), and received a Gold Award in the category of student journals for the SSP Epic Awards.

Organizing the 2025 Symposium

The second Student Journal Symposium encompassed a wider representation of student journals, universities, and topic areas. **Amelia Nason** returned to co-organize the 2025 Symposium. GW undergraduate honors student



Breanna Crossman, who spoke as a panelist in the inaugural Symposium, joined as co-organizer of this year's second Symposium, as did **Maiya Norwood**, who also served last year as a student panelist and subsequently joined GW's MPS in Publishing Program, and **Jessica Irving**, also a publishing student. Over eight months, we researched and conducted direct outreach to ~200 undergraduate and graduate level student journals across the US and internationally, and worked with CUR, LPC, SSP, and the Association of University Presses (AUPresses) to invite panelists and speakers.

We invited both presentations and panelists, determined themes, and were inclusive in accommodating all students, faculty and others who submitted proposals. Our 73 speakers from 34 student-led journals included undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, administrators, academic librarians, and publishing professionals. The Symposium has also served as an important learning experience for these students, organizing and implementing a publishing conference.

The conference has served as an important learning experience for the student co-organizers, as we invited presentations and panelists, determined themes, and were inclusive in accommodating all those who submitted proposals.

Amelia Nason, Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, George Washington University, Class of 2026—2024 and 2025 Symposium co-organizer: “In my second year planning the Student Journal Symposium, I had the great benefit of knowing what the result—a successful, engaging program—looked like, and I’m proud of how our team grew last year’s DMV-focused event into an international conference. John and I were



joined by Breanna, Maiya, and Jessica for this year's Symposium, and with five busy people working on a multi-day symposium for eight months, I believe the key to our success was centralized organization systems. We shared spreadsheets and communications tools on our journal research process that extended to points of contact for panelists and presenters, improving consistency and efficiency with the journals we reached out to and partnered with, eliminating redundancy in the information they received. Hosting the Student Journal Symposium has been one of my favorite college projects. It can be hard to form connections outside of your specialization when it comes to student journals, particularly with the effort that goes into creating a final product on a tight schedule and requiring considerable time for those involved. I love the rewarding feeling of getting everyone with a shared passion together in a room, and it was exciting to see undergraduate and graduate, research and literary, and East and West Coast journals in conversation with one another. I greatly look forward to the Symposium's continued development next year."

Breanna Crossman, GW Elliott School of International Affairs, Class of 2026—2024 Symposium speaker and 2025 Symposium co-organizer: "Collaborating with our team on the planning and execution of the second Student Journal Symposium was one of the highlights of my year, especially seeing the diversity of interests and institutions represented from various levels of academia. For many student publications, spreading awareness beyond their campus and gaining recognition for their work can be a difficult task. Last year, I participated as a panelist representing GW's Undergraduate Law Review; it was

a unique chance to share some of our practices and goals with a wider research community and build connections with local publications. I looked forward to returning as a student co-organizer and helping with the behind-the-scenes work necessary to facilitate an event that spanned multiple days with dozens of speakers from around the world. I was fortunate to engage with student researchers whose passions ranged from scientific communication and philosophy to literary arts and zine-making.”

Maiya Norwood, MPS in Publishing student (expected Summer 2026) —2024 speaker and 2025 Symposium co-organizer: “As a current student in GW’s Master of Professional Studies Publishing program, I had been looking forward to this symposium since the inaugural event last year. When I was a panelist as a Howard University Student, speaking on behalf of *The Amistad*, an undergraduate literary arts journal, I was able to share my opinions and receive feedback from others. The sense of community within the room made me excited to return. As a result of my participation last year, I became a student in the Publishing degree program. This year, I joined the Symposium as a co-organizer and was able to see what happens behind the scenes at such an event: a lot of communication and work, but also collaboration that resulted in an event that was well-received and successful. The Symposium connects young publishers with each other and to those who are more seasoned within the industry.”

Jessica Irving, MPS in Publishing graduate student (expected Summer 2025) —2025 Symposium co-organizer: “As one of the student co-organizers, I had the pleasure of helping plan and deliver the 2nd Student Journal Symposium. Participating in conferences as a student is always fulfilling, but organizing this type of event offers a unique chance to contribute to the behind-the-scenes work that makes a successful conference possible. As a conference attendee, you have opportunities to engage with, learn from, and connect with your peers. But as an organizer, you are introduced to a whole other list of responsibilities—ones that make the event’s success much more rewarding. Since this was only the second year of the Symposium, and my first year co-organizing, there was a lot to learn, but I found that the opportunity to support an event that uplifts student-led publications made navigating the unknowns worthwhile. It was rewarding to see the culmination of our hard work come to life over the course of the Symposium’s two days. We saw significant growth this year, with speakers representing over thirty journals from across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom; it showed that the value of the Symposium was being recognized far beyond our local community. I am proud to have played a part in creating a space where student editors and scholars

could connect, share ideas, and support one another's work, and I am excited to see how the Symposium continues to grow and evolve in the coming years."

Reflections on the 2025 Symposium

After our 2025 Symposium, we solicited feedback about and comments from presenters, panelists, and attendees about the conference as well as student journals and their role in the publishing ecosystem. [Comments below are provided with the author's permission and have been edited for brevity.]

Hind Berji, managing editor of the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*, GW MPS in Publishing student—2025 Symposium presenter: "The GW Publishing program's second annual Student Journal Symposium offered us a unique opportunity to critically evaluate the current state of our student-led journal, the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* (GWJEP), and chart a course for its future growth. Our presentation reflected on the journal's progress since its launch in 2020—tracing the evolution of its editorial structures, functional workflows, and broader organizational insights. We identified and shared actionable strategies to address persistent challenges such as student turnover, onboarding inconsistencies, and outreach efforts. These conversations are essential not only for sustaining the journal's operations but also for ensuring it can scale to meet the needs of a dynamic, evolving publishing landscape."

"As Managing Editor, my role has been primarily operational, offering a unique vantage point to see how the lessons we study in our graduate program translate into real-world challenges and opportunities. It's a practical laboratory where I've been able to troubleshoot issues within our teams, from onboarding and leadership transitions to refining workflows and outreach. This hands-on experience has deepened my understanding of the academic publishing process and allowed me to see firsthand how student-led publications can leverage professional practices to scale their reach and impact. The symposium itself provided a wonderful forum to compare these experiences with my peers and to gather new ideas that can inform the journal team's work moving forward."

Nicole Bespalov, Co-Editor-in-Chief of *CommonHealth*, Doctor of Nursing (DNP) candidate Temple University—2025 Symposium panelist: "The Symposium provided a large-scale meeting across universities, both international and national, and allowed students in all stages of academic and journal experience to convene and learn. We also heard from scholarly professionals, which contextualized the broader picture of what publishing can look like. Student run journals are integral to the promotion of just about any higher education university's mission for dissemination of research and

encourages student and faculty collaboration. It was a great experience hearing from so many different students how they run their journal, what works, and what doesn't."

Hannah Crago, Open Research Development Librarian, University of Essex—2025 Symposium presenter: "Student Journals are increasingly relevant and important. Recognizing students as researchers in and of themselves provides extra value in their degree and illustrates the further benefits of completing a University-level program. Instead of assignments being filed away and forgotten, published student authors gain confidence, hone their writing and communication skills, and gain a sense of pride in their work. Giving students a voice on topics that are important to them also allows for new ideas and perspectives to enter academia and can help to identify emerging trends and concerns. For Universities themselves, hosting student journals allows a showcase of the work their students can produce, and when in open access form, enables prospective students to get a sense of the kind of work they could produce if studying there."

Dr. V Lunde Dadon MD JD, Lofton Publishing Corporation—2025 Symposium attendee: "I learned a lot from the presentations on impact factors and citation scores and metrics. I look forward to the Symposium continuing to strengthen the impact of student-led journals on the community."

Yana Tartakovskiy, Associate Editor, *The Undergraduate Political Review*, University of Connecticut—2025 Symposium panelist: "Student journals are the best platform for students to showcase their scholarship and have the potential to have their findings be taken seriously in the research community. As a student and future researcher, you build skills that can't be taught in a class or for a writing assignment. You must dedicate time outside of the classroom and other activities to find the topic and data supporting your research question, edit and re-write your paper, and then get feedback from your peers who are going through the same process as you are. If you also contribute to your journal as an editor, as I did, you need to dedicate even more time to teach and mentor new writers on what a good, published article looks like. Completing this work while also studying makes student journals more innovative and more engaging to read, boosts the general knowledge of the student body, and spreads awareness about topics that faculty might overlook."

Dr. Leroy Myers, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Research Administration and Student Mentorship at Johns Hopkins University—2025 Symposium panelist: "The Symposium demonstrates the growing emphasis on undergraduate journals and editorship. High impact practices like undergraduate research attract university students looking to experiential

learning amid a job market yearning for candidates equipped with soft skills honed through writing, critical thinking, and reflection.”

Danielle Padula, Head of Marketing and Community Development at Scholastica—2025 Symposium plenary session moderator and conference sponsor: “College students often miss out on opportunities to learn about the scholarly publishing industry as a field they might want to join (I was almost one of them, until I happened upon an internship at a translation studies publisher many moons ago!). The GWU MPS in Publishing Program and associated GWU Student Journal Symposium help fill that lacuna by highlighting and inspiring the development of undergraduate and graduate student-run journals as tools to train the next generation of publishers. Students who plan to go into research also learn hands-on knowledge of how the peer review and publishing process works. Aren’t scholarly communication folks always lamenting the lack of peer reviewer training?!”

“As discussed during this year’s Symposium, since many student journals are open access, they also help expose those entering the publishing profession to emerging publishing models—these students are ready to shake up the status quo and are already innovating! They’re grappling with many of the same challenges as professionals, and they shared great advice for dealing with them, from ensuring continuity during editor transitions to cultivating welcoming work cultures to devising innovative journal marketing strategies. Scholarly publishing professionals could benefit from engaging with initiatives like the GWU Student Journal Symposium to support and connect with those considering entering the industry. I hope this post inspires some interest in that!”

The 2026 Student Journal Symposium

Planning is underway for the 3rd [Student Journal Symposium for Literary and Research Publications](#), which will be held April 23, 2026, as a hybrid event, at the George Washington University and virtually (with a possible second day on April 24). The entire team—Amelia, Breanna, Jessica, and Maiya—are returning to co-organize the third symposium, which we hope continues to grow and have a greater impact each year.

Along with our call for speakers and presentations, we are also encouraging student-led journals, and others, to enter their publications in the Society for Scholarly Publishing’s annual [Epic Awards](#). The awards celebrate Excellence in Publishing, Information Technology, and Communications, recognize outstanding achievements in publications, marketing, media and more, and

include four Student Journal EPIC Awards categories: [Student Journal—Research](#); [Student Journal—Literary](#); [Student Publication Media Project](#); [Student Publication Continuity Plan](#).

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