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Dear Readers,

I'm delighted to present the newest issue of the GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing. Each volume is a reminder of the curiosity, rigor, and integrity that drives our community, and this issue is no exception. Our contributors explore emerging and existing challenges to the ethical framework of the publishing industry. Their contributions challenge the "norm" and broaden the conversation of what constitutes ethical practices in the media.

This is my first issue with the journal, and I am grateful for the opportunity to help it grow, to refine its processes, and to create a space where thoughtful scholarship can flourish. However, I could not have done it alone. I want to extend my gratitude to our authors, reviewers, and the journal's dedicated team. Their commitment is what made this publication possible, and they are the future of publishing. I also want to thank you, dear reader, for engaging with and supporting the journal. I hope you enjoy the issue.

Happy reading,

Cecilia Gray
Managing Editor
GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

Roundtable

Author vs. Art

The moral dilemma between controversial creators, the art that they produce, and the communities that they build

Roundtable Facilitated by Brianna Lantz

In today's world, accountability plays a major part in how consumers engage with creative work, especially the written medium. Consumers often take their personal beliefs and morals into consideration when interacting with controversial work. This tension between the product and the producer prompts the question of how readers and publishers interact with texts and authors.

> **What ethical responsibility do publishers, readers, and critics bear when the creator's personal beliefs conflict with the values of their work, and the values of those engaging with their work?**

Our contributors, Elena Peñaloza and Rachael Rhine Milliard, explore this question while considering issues, such as authors' legacies, time, and the freedoms that define artistic creation.

Contributors

Elena Peñaloza

Elena Peñaloza is in her final year in the GWU Publishing program and plans to graduate in May 2026. A Navy veteran and currently an intern at Salky Literary Management, she serves on the Editorial and Strategy & Sustainability committees of the *GWJournal of Ethics and Publishing*.

Rachael Rhine Milliard

Rachael L. Rhine Milliard graduated from the GW Publishing program in December 2024. She has served on multiple GWJEP committees and currently works as a freelance editor for Gallopade International and private clients. She is also a contributing editor for *The Asia Cable* and a first reader for the *Radon Journal*.

Elena Peñaloza

In the age of 'cancel culture'[1] I think that this question is an imperative one. There has been a massive movement of removing authors' works, cancelling their personal brands, or outright hating content being constructed around authors and, by extension, their work. But what I despise most about cancel culture is the dismissal of discussion. I think at the heart of literature and creative works is the discussions that they create. There have been incredibly influential books that have sparked movements for change across the country and have traveled across borders into the hearts of readers. As publishers I think there is a major responsibility to be the driver of the discussion surrounding controversial authors, especially authors who are no longer with us, but whose works are still being published.

This is where we must do our due diligence in the forwards and editorial notes. For works that were originally published in a different time and social climate, we need to add explanations of why the work still matters, the differences in language from the original publication to now, and of course, why the publisher is continuing to publish these works. I think that exceptions are allowable for works that were made in different time periods because many of them are written in direct response to what was happening then. Especially as readers, I think we need to think critically about these works and understand

1 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cancel%20culture

what made them influential during that time period and how they can be adapted to create discussion and change in our own time. What lessons can we learn that are still relevant today?

For works that are attached to authors that have conflicting personal beliefs to their readers I think that is when readers need to consider their buying power. There are works that have had major impacts on our lives from a young age that now as adults we know more about the authors and we might find that their values don't align with our own. If that is the case then you have the opportunity to separate yourself from the work and its subsequent merchandise. The same goes for publishers and critics. If an author no longer aligns with a publisher's mission, then it is the publisher's responsibility to address that to their readers. Things like contracts and ongoing publications may take time for them to work through. But, in the end, they also have a responsibility to their audience to open that discussion on why they are or are not moving forward with an author's work anymore.

I think that it is wholly possible to love the work and not love the author, but that comes with its own implications. Are you willing to have the discussions with your fellow readers and be open to hearing how an author's actions have impacted the lives of others? And are you willing to critically look at the work and see why it matters? Or why it may be time to shelve it for good?

> While Elena centers her discussion on current culture, language, and accountability, Rachael examines the constitutional and professional dilemmas that publishers, readers, and critics alike may face when engaging with controversial work.

Rachael Rhine Milliard

Any discussion of the ethical responsibilities publishers, readers, and critics bear when engaging with a piece of work that presents values opposed to their own must include the First Amendment, societal factors, and the tension between the personal and professional roles of individuals and those of private enterprises. There is no easy, single answer. Here, I have briefly discussed the most important items to consider when addressing the question.

One of the founding principles of the United States is that people must be free to share their thoughts and opinions without fear of reprisal from their government. Another is that people have the right to their own religious practices. These ideas are enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution[2] of the United States of America. The First Amendment provides for the freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom to peaceably assemble, the right to petition the government, and that the government may not prohibit the free exercise of these rights. The First Amendment is the starting point for understanding the ethical responsibilities of publishers, readers, and critics regarding the conflict between personal beliefs and the values presented or represented in works of art—literary, performative, and visual.

Without the First Amendment, no one would be able to express themselves. This amendment protects all speech, art, and ideas. If it only protected one perspective, US citizens would not be part of a republic; they would be part of an authoritarian regime. Creators, then, can create whatever they like because the First Amendment protects them. In my opinion, they should be protected. Just because an individual might not like what a creator has to say does not mean that individual can infringe on the creator's rights.

The second idea to address is one of perspective. The majority typically defines the 'moral right' or 'moral propriety' for a society. 'Problematic' is a nebulous term that can be used to justify any number of abuses against the First Amendment rights of persons living and entities operating within the United States. Just because a work's themes do not align with the desired moral values or perspectives of the predominant beliefs of the society does not mean that the work is, in fact, problematic. There is an old maxim that covers this pretty well: "What is right is not always easy. What is easy is not always right."

That brief discussion brings us to the final point: how the tension between personal beliefs and professional conduct of individual and business entities influences the ethical responsibilities of those surrounding a work of art. I

2 https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/

have a right to my personal beliefs. But my rights to my own opinions and expressions of those opinions should not be allowed to infringe on the ability and rights of others to have and express their opinions. The works I find problematic are not the same as those another will find problematic. But, as an editor and a consumer, I must still engage with these works. My professional responsibilities and the ethical responsibility not to encroach on another's rights, as described in the Constitution, require that I not inflict my opinions on the presentation or consumption of work I might consider problematic. I also have a choice about where I work and what clients I choose. I tend to send work I fear I won't be able to be neutral about to businesses that share the creator's perspective. And though I may disagree with them, they still have a right to exist and I often still read or engage with that work as a consumer.

Publishers, critics, and consumers all have a right to their own thoughts, opinions, and religions. Privately-held businesses, since corporations were ruled to be people, have a right to refuse to publish, read, or be positive about a work's theme with which they disagree. Public spaces have an obligation to all people and must walk a finer line. That is a discussion for another time. But privately-held businesses and each individual have a moral obligation not to infringe on another's expression of their beliefs, thoughts, and opinions. But they also have a right not to sell, review, or engage with the work they consider problematic. They also have a right to engage with the work in a manner that exercises their beliefs, thoughts, and opinions—with the caveat that the manner of disagreement does not damage personal property or person. I have intentionally kept specific works out of this discussion because of the nebulous nature of the term 'problematic works.' Ultimately, I think there is considerable value in reading and working with works one might consider 'problematic.' Such art is usually incredibly instructive. And such art should not be excluded from the world because it happens to not align with personal or societal beliefs.

This roundtable offers two complementary perspectives on the responsibilities surrounding controversial art that publishers and consumers should consider when engaging with problematic work and creators. While everyone has the right to freedom of expression, it may be difficult for readers to find a common ground for certain moral dilemmas.

As readers and publishing professionals, we must continually ask:

Where does ethical responsibility truly begin or end?

At what point does it seem to be a search for fault rather than genuine ethical engagement? And what are we as consumers willing to do in order to stand with our own beliefs?

Articles

Judging a Book by Its Cover

How Inclusive Are Cover Designs of Popular Medical Books?

By Trevor Lipscombe and Clare Delmore

Abstract

Popular medical books disseminate information widely. Publishers attract readers partly by the cover art, but how inclusive are such book designs? Here, we analyze popular medical books published in the past five years and available on Amazon.com, determining the proportion of those with typographical covers and those with cover illustrations containing photographic images of one or more people. For the latter, we recorded the race of those depicted. We also analyzed medical images from three major stock photo companies. We determined that the majority of recent book covers are typographical, whereas older books are more likely to have photographic covers, and those covers were more likely to depict Whites only. Stock photographs, in contrast, significantly overrepresented Whites as both doctors and as patients. Physicians who write popular medical books should take steps to ensure that their publisher will create a book design that is inclusive of all members of society.

Introduction

In George Eliot's (Mary Ann Evans) novel *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie Tulliver is found reading Daniel Defoe's *History of the Devil*. Maggie's father defends her, saying, "It seems one mustn't judge by th'outside." The idea that we should not judge a book by its cover is now commonplace. Publishers know full well, however, that cover designs do indeed sell books.

A standard publishing strategy for a well-known author is to display the author's photo on the front cover. Sandra Lee, the dermatologist known to millions of TV viewers as Dr. Pimple Popper, is on the cover of her co-written book *Put Your Best Face Forward: The Ultimate Guide to Skin Care from Acne to Anti-Aging.* Another common strategy for medical books is an all-type jacket; these have the disadvantage of being impersonal, but whose strength is the same as its weakness: no patient group is excluded.[1]

Understanding from previous studies that public confidence in medical professionals is influenced by scrub color and the presence of a white coat,[2,3,4] we endeavored to extend existing research on perceived gender bias and anti-racism by establishing data sets related to race and cover illustrations in popular medical books. As such, this work relates to a previous study that explored buying habits based on authors' race, gender, and age,[5] and one that explores publishers' possible gender bias based on the percentage of female authors and perceived gender-biased pricing strategies,[6] and an article that explored editorial efforts to foster anti-racism in family medicine journals.[7]

Method

1 Arthur Conan Doyle, a former ophthalmologist, wrote a collection of medically themed short stories that were published in 1894 under the title *Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fantasies of Medical Life*. He wrote to the publisher, Algernon Methuen, on June 4, 1894, enclosing a hand-drawn version of a cover design, complete with a red lamp (the sign of a general practitioner in England). His previous success as the author of the Sherlock Holmes stories meant that he got the cover he wanted.

2 Xun H, Chen J, Sun AH, et al. "Public Perceptions of Physician Attire and Professionalism in the US." *JAMA Network Open|Medical Education*, July 30, 2021, doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.17779

3 Hribar C, Chandran A, Piazza M, et al. "Association Between Patient Perception of Surgeons and Color of Scrub Attire" *JAMA Surg.* Published online January 11, 2023. doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2022.5837

4 The cover design for Atul Gawande's book *Better: A Surgeon's Notes on Performance* (New York: Picador, 2008) is a case in point.

5 Weinberg DB and Kapelner A. "Do book consumers discriminate against Black, female, or young authors?" *PLoS One.* 2022 Jun 13; 17(6): e0267537.

6 Weinberg DB and Kapelner A. "Comparing gender discrimination and inequality in indie and traditional publishing." *PLoS One.* 2018 Apr 9; 13(4):e0195298. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0195298

7 Schrager S, Bowman M, and Richardson C. "*Family Medicine* editors collaborate towards antiracist publishing." *Learned Publishing* 2023 Jan; 36(1): 68–72.

To identify paperback covers to include in the study, we used two distinct sources. First, we undertook a "broad coverage" approach. To do so, we went to Amazon.com—the leading online seller of books, accounting for approximately 50% of book sales in the United States per year. There, we searched for books in the category, "Health, Fitness, and Dieting" in the subsection "Diseases and Physical Ailments." These were further narrowed to those titles published in paperback (as these are intended to be popular) and priced under US $40. We then selected those books written by medical doctors (MD or DO) published within the past five years. The resulting list comprised 186 titles. Each cover was recorded as either being typographical or having a photograph of one or more people on the cover. For photographic covers, we assessed and recorded the race of those depicted. This has inherent problems because we assign race and gender without consulting the depicted persons, and it adds a strong element of subjectivity to the process. It does reflect, though, the process used in allocating race and gender in the second source of data.

This second set of data came from medical images available from three major stock photo companies: Shutterstock,[8] Alamy,[9] and Istock.[10] All three license images from their collections for use not only in medical books, but any form of medical literature. Image collections can be searched for photographs containing one person only, of one race, or a specific gender. Therefore, we used the stock photo company's description of the photographic subject (unlike book covers, where we had to make judgment calls). For the stock photos, we searched for "physician" and "surgeons operating." We also searched for four illnesses that are more common in communities that are poor and underserved: heart disease, COVID, diabetes, and tuberculosis.

Results

Of the 186 titles found through Amazon, 146 (78.5%) are typographical. Of those with illustrations, 12 (6.5%) are an author photo; 14 (7.5%) are photos of a single person, not the author; and 14 (7.5%) are group photos.

For the 40 covers that employ photographs as part of the cover design, the demographic breakdown of subjects is shown in Table 1. We report the covers as either being of an author, a group shot, or a solo person who is not the author—intended to represent the potential reader of the book.

8 www.shutterstock.com
9 www.alamy.com
10 www.istock.com

Author (White)	8
Author (Non-White)	4
Author (total)	**12 (30.0%)**
Group photo (White)	2
Group photo (African American)	1
Group photo (Multiracial)	11
Group photo (Total)	**14 (35.0%)**
Solo (White)	10
Solo (indeterminate)	4
Solo (Total)	**14 (35.0%)**

Table 1: Demographic breakdown of illustrations used on popular medical books on Amazon.

To determine whether cover designs are changing over time, we divided the 186 titles into two halves ("newer" and "older") for the purposes of comparison. The higher-level data are displayed in Table 2.

Type	Total	Typographical	Author Photo	Group Shot	Solo Shot
Older	93	72 (77.4%)	6 (6.5%)	4 (4.3%)	11 (11.8%)
Newer	93	74 (79.6%)	6 (6.5%)	10 (10.8%)	3 (3.2%)

Table 2: Changes in cover illustrations over time of popular medical books on Amazon.

For the illustrated covers, the demographic breakdown is shown in Table 3.

Type of photo or image used	Older	Newer
Author (White)	2	6
Author (Non-White)	4	0
Author (Total)	**6 (28.6%)**	**6 (31.6%)**
Group Shot (White)	1	1
Group Shot (African American)	0	1
Group Shot (Multiracial)	3	8
Group Shot (Total)	**4 (19.0%)**	**10 (52.6%)**
Solo Shot (White)	8	2
Solo shot (Indeterminable)	3	1
Solo Shot (Total)	**11 (52.4%)**	**3 (15.8%)**
Total	**21**	**19**

Table 3: Illustrated cover breakdown.

For the three stock photo companies, we used their search function capabilities to look for photographs that contained just one subject. Many of the photographs returned for the search "physicians" were also included in the results for a search for "surgeons." As a consequence, we report the data for the "physicians" search, but also for the search "surgeons operating."
Table 4 contains the reported data.

Search Term	Company	Total Photos	African American	Native American	Women
"Physicians"	Shutterstock	321424	8077(2.5%)	238(0.07%)	178857 (55.7%)
"Physicians"	Alamy	5296	111 (2.1%)	2 (0.04%)	1708 (32.3%)
"Physicians"	Istock	458052	31953 (7.0%)	126 (0.03%)	76342 (16.7%)

Search Term	Company	Total Photos	African American	Native American	Women
"Surgeons Operating"	Shutterstock	16158	99 (0.61%)	3 (0.02%)	7432 (46%)
"Surgeons Operating"	Alamy	867	11 (1.27%)	0	148 (17.1%)
"Surgeons Operating"	Istock	29417	2006 (6.8%)	17 (0.06%)	17014 (57.8%)

Table 4: Demographics of physicians' and surgeons' photographs available from stock photo companies.

We analyzed photographs that are intended to portray patients with a number of common illnesses. The reported stock photo company demographics are in Table 5.

Search Term	Company	Total Photos	African American	Native American	Women
"Heart disease patients"	Shutterstock	11,300	114 (1.01%)	1 (0.01%)	6673 (59%)
"Heart disease patients"	Alamy	2449	20 (0.82%)	0	688 (28%)
"Heart disease patients"	Istock	1437	728 (50.7%)	1 (0.07%)	704 (49%)
"COVID patients"	Shutterstock	69569	1469 (2.11%)	77 (0.11%)	40562 (58.3%)
"COVID patients"	Alamy	22490	936 (4.16%)	0	9008 (40.1%)
"COVID patients"	Istock	38745	2894 (7.5%)	5 (0.01%)	23013 (59.4%)
"Diabetes patient"					
"COVID patients"	Shutterstock	6702	139 (2.1%)	5 (0.08%)	4581 (68.4%)
"COVID patients"	Alamy	2113	47 (2.2%)	0	974 (46.1%)
"COVID patients"	Istock	6227	156 (2.5%)	8 (0.1%)	3769 (60.5%)
"Tuberculosis patient"	Shutterstock	1112	37 (3.3%)	0	621 (55.9%)

Search Term	Company	Total Photos	African American	Native American	Women
"Tuberculosis patient"	Alamy	253	4 (1.5%)	0	47 (18.6%)
"Tuberculosis patient"	Istock	421	8 (1.9%)	0	121 (28.8%)

Table 5: Demographic analysis of images of patients with four common diseases.

Discussion

For books on Amazon published in the past five years, cover designs have remained constant, in the sense that most were, and still are, typographical. While all-type covers might not be inviting or particularly reader friendly, they do not exclude potential readers. In addition, the number of covers that feature author photos remains constant, though the percentage of these in which the author is White is relatively high. Whether this reflects an implicit preference by publishers to publish books by those authors, a tendency to put photos of White authors on book covers, or neither, is difficult to determine. It may also be that White authors have greater access and support during the book-writing process, and as a consequence are overrepresented as authors. The major overall shift, though, has been to go from photographs of individuals who are not authors to group shots. In particular, the change has been essentially due to replacing images of solo Whites with multiracial groups. This strongly suggests, then, that publishers are aware of the previous lack of inclusivity of non-White patient groups on book covers and have altered book designs accordingly.

The images provided by stock photo companies are more problematic. Photographers enter into arrangements with these companies to license the photographs on their behalf, but this practice seemingly has led to the demographics being greatly at odds with actual data.

Recent data from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) reveal that women, African Americans, and Native Americans constitute 37.1%,[11] 5.73%, and 0.30%[12] respectively of all physicians

11 According to the AAMC, in 2021, 351, 117 physicians were women. This is out of nearly 946,790 physicians total. 2022 Physician Specialty Data Report Executive Summary | AAMC

12 2022 Physician Specialty Data Report Executive Summary | AAMC

currently practicing in the United States. Across the three stock photo companies, those percentages were 32.7%, 5.11%, and 0.05%. Thus, all three groups are underrepresented by stock photo companies, and are statistically significant as indicated by chi-square tests ($p<0.05$).[13]

For simplicity, we compare the data for "surgeons operating" with the AAMC data for general surgeons.[14] Stock photo images were 53% women and 4.6% African American, while images of Native American surgeons constituted only 0.04% of those available. Women were statistically significantly overrepresented ($p <0.05$), but African American and Native American surgeons were underrepresented ($p<0.05$). This suggests that there is a dearth of images portraying African American and Native American surgeons, which may have implications for attracting young members of those communities into surgical professions.

Data also shows that African Americans and Native Americans constitute 8.5% and 0.21% of all COVID-19 patients,[15] whereas the stock photo company images are 4.05 and 0.06%. A standard chi-square test shows that these differences are statistically significant ($p <0.05$), with stock images underrepresenting the African American and Native American communities. This underrepresentation of African Americans is more concerning, given the stark difference in healthcare outcomes between Black and White populations.[16]

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) data show that African Americans and Native Americans constitute 12.1% and 14.5% of all diabetes patients,[17] compared to 2.3% and 0.09% of stock images. Given that type 2 diabetes is more than twice as prevalent in Native American populations as compared to non-white Hispanics,[18] the lack of availability of suitable medical images is troubling.

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13 For more on statistical significance, p values, and confidence levels, see for example Keith Gregson *Understanding Mathematics, Second edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

14 https://www.aamc.org/data-reports/workforce/data/active-physicians-sex-specialty-2021

15 Disparities in COVID-19 Outcomes by Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis | Infectious Diseases | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network

16 Brandon, WP. "Assessing Black America's experience during the COVID-19 Plague." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 2022 Aug 22; 33(3): 1715–1718.

17 By the Numbers: Diabetes in America | Diabetes | CDC

18 Carlson AE, Aronson B, Unzen M, et al. "Apathy and Type 2 Diabetes among American Indians: Exploring the Protective Effects of Traditional Cultural Involvement." *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* 2017 May; 28(2): 770–783

For tuberculosis patients, the CDC reports 18% and 1%, compared to 2.75% and 0%, respectively, of all stock images.[19] Data from the CDC also shows that African Americans and Native Americans constitute 22.6% and 15.5% of all heart disease patients,[20] compared to 5.7% and 0.013% in stock photo images.

If publishers of medical literature seek photographs to reflect the ethnicity of the groups affected by these illnesses, they will be hard-pressed to find them in stock photo companies. African and Native Americans are clearly excluded from the medical literature, and their underrepresentation is statistically significant ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion and Prospects

Medical illustrations serve a variety of purposes, often to appeal to a specific readership or viewership. Our research shows that, in terms of cover illustrations, the book industry has—over the past five years–kept the percentage of typographical covers and author photographs approximately constant. There has been a marked shift, though, away from photographs of a single patient (typically white) and towards multiracial group photographs, in a step towards inclusivity, but also to appeal to a broader readership.

Currently, images from stock photo companies do not reflect the racial or gender makeup of physicians and surgeons. They also significantly underrepresent African and Native Americans among patients with those diseases that particularly affect both groups. Stock-photo companies, though, are part of a multi-billion-dollar industry, and change in current practices will not come easily.

This present study is, in many ways, a first step in looking at diversity, equity, and inclusion regarding university press book publishing, and certainly additional studies are required. It also constitutes, and is limited by being, a retrospective study, using only a subset of freely available cover illustrations. The data suggests, though, a recent and encouraging movement towards typographical designs on medical books, which obviates the difficulties outlined here.

Authors, though, have a voice and, arguably, a responsibility. For example, in contract negotiations for a book that a publisher believes will generate sales, the publisher might grant authors (or their agents) consultation rights over cover

19 Trends 2021 | Data & Statistics | TB | CDC
20 Heart Disease Facts | cdc.gov

design. Indeed, there is readily available language for publishing contracts that guarantees an author either consultation or approval rights over some aspect of the final book.[21] The existence of standard contractual wording suggests that there is a need for it; that asking for, say, input on cover design is not unknown in the publishing world. Authors can raise their voices, and university presses in particular, may well be attentive listeners.

21 Roy S. Kaufman *Publishing Forms and Contracts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), page 136 (clauses L and M).

AI as a Creative

By Tara Jacobi

Introduction

Today, writers are asking whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) will replace them. Understanding whether AI will be the writer of future literature requires unpacking what it means to be a writer and the essence of literature itself. An in-depth understanding entails knowing all vital aspects of being a professional writer, which includes the business or legal aspects of a working writer and the creative aspects which focuses on the essence of producing superlative literature. Both are completely different spheres of influence but each requires the writer's attention. Only after examining these aspects might we come to understand AI as a creative.

The first part of this article will debrief the legalities of how rights are established in written work. This includes looking at establishing a copyright or legal ownership. Once copyright is established, the next task is the ability to enter into contracts with a publisher to be able to publish work. After this analysis we will see where AI currently stands in its ability to engage in the writing business.

The second part of this article will examine the nature of literature. What is literature? In particular, what is great literature? And why? We know AI can be trained to produce literature, but the focus here will be on whether AI can produce works of great significance and why. After providing a framework for what makes for exceptional literature from iconic authors, publishers of literary fiction and classic works we will have a better understanding of AI's abilities and limitations.

After considering both these aspects of being a creative writer, we will have a more complete view of what it means to be a professional writer. Through this

perspective, we can effectively answer whether AI alone can be a professional writer or not. The next set of logical questions which follow are addressed in the third part of this article where we will dive into whether it is ethical for writers to use AI in publishing literature. And if so, how? Here, we will explore how some writers are currently using AI as a tool and writers' perspectives about AI. This will allow us to see the benefits and limitations available for a writer using AI in their work. At this point, we can gain further insight into what might be an ethical or unethical use of AI and areas where future research is needed.

Legal Ownership of Literature Copyright

Producing written work establishes a copyright or exclusive legal right to the writing. It also creates responsibilities and denotes control over the writing.

In drafting the United States Constitution, the founding fathers explicitly gave Congress the power as stated within, "to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries." [1] In other words, by writing the document establishing our government, the framers took the time to establish "exclusive rights," for authors in the writing they produce. These "exclusive rights," in the literary world are otherwise known as a copyright. Copyright was codified in the Copyright Act of 1976 found in Title 17 of the US Code. This established modern copyright law which still held true to the spirit of the US Constitution and protected an author's exclusive right in their literary work.

After an author creates a literary work, they have not only established an exclusive right, but this exclusive right equals a number of distinct rights bundled together for a certain period of time. As my publishing professors explained, this bundle of exclusive rights outlined in the statute includes: the right to reproduce or copy the work; the right to make other derivative works based upon the original work; the right to distribute the work by giving, lending, or selling it; and the right to perform or display the work publicly. These exclusive rights in the work exist for the duration of the creator's life plus seventy years.[2] With these exclusive rights come responsibilities. These responsibilities include exercising control over the work and determining just how the work will or will not be used.

Copyright law initially required an author to adhere to certain formalities

1 The United States Constitution, Article I, Section 8 (8).

2 Yale Library: Copyright Guidance: Copyright for Authors and Creators, https://guides.library.yale.edu/copyrightguidance/CopyrightForAuthors#

by registering a claim over their work with the US Copyright Office as well as placing a notice on all copies of the work listing certain information. However, in 1988 the United States joined the Berne Copyright Convention, an international treaty that establishes a framework for copyright protection. As a condition of its membership, the United States was forced to abandon the requirements of registration it previously required. Therefore, copyright registration is now voluntary, not mandatory.[3] Yet, who or what can actually register a claim or exclusive right to written work is telling. Further clarification to both the US Constitution and federal copyright law's definition of an author is provided by the US Copyright Office. The office's guidance is essential to who can actually hold a copyright and be the lawful owner of writing produced.

The US Copyright Office issued a summary of the US Copyright Office's practices. In doing so, the Compendium III of US Copyright Office Practice, explained the following:

> The US Copyright Office will register an original work of authorship, provided that the work was created by a human being.
>
> (Copyright law) only protects 'the fruits of intellectual labor' that 'are founded in the creative powers of the mind.' Because copyright law is limited to 'original intellectual conceptions of the author,' the Office will refuse to register a claim if it determines that a human being did not create the work. [4]

The US Copyright Office provides us with an even more detailed definition of an author than given to us by the US Constitution or federal copyright law. This definition, however, is grounded in both the US Constitution and federal copyright law. In explaining the US Copyright Office's practice of granting a copyright to an author, we learn the holder of a copyright must be a human. In other words, writing produced by a human is required to obtain a copyright.

The US Copyright Office has been analyzing the legal ramifications of AI in relation to copyright law. Since AI has been on the horizon, the US Copyright Office has issued several reports about the legal ramifications of AI, which are beyond the scope of this article to discuss, but essential to mention here. What is important to remember here is that it has not changed its stance

3 Edward Samuels, *The Illustrated Story of Copyright* (Thomas Dune Books, 2000).

4 U.S. Copyright Office, Compendium of U.S. Copyright Office Practices Sec. 306 (3rd ed 2017).

as articulated above.

The Authors Guild issued Comments In the Matter of Impact of Artificial Intelligence ("AI") Technologies on Copyright, making the following statement:

> …although the Constitution does not define authors and inventors as human beings or natural persons, it is clear from the context and the usage of their words at the time that the framers meant humans—not animals or paranormal or artificial beings. A century of Supreme Court jurisprudence further validates the view that authorship is necessarily a product of *human* intellect.[5]

AI cannot apply or obtain copyright protection in whatever writing it produces. It has no legal basis to exercise control over what it creates or produces. AI cannot obtain exclusive rights or take control over its work. Only humans can. This is not to say AI cannot produce written work or literature. It can. However, in discussions it is important to note we are sometimes working with different definitions of what it means to be a writer or author or creator of literature. The first definition being the producer of a literary work, but no more. Another definition of an author is one being, not only the producer of the work but also the one with legal rights to the work. According to the US Copyright Office, AI cannot be a recognized author. Therefore, AI holds no foundational legal basis for moving forward to engage in the business of being a writer or creative.

Contracts

When authors or creatives exercise their rights and control over their writing, they do so for the sake of publishing their work. In providing their work for publication, it is necessary for writers to enter into agreements or contracts with publishers. Publishing contracts are entered into whether work is produced in traditional print or digital format or whether it be in journals, magazines, or in book form. In the simplest form these agreements or contracts are promises. Cornell's Legal Information Institute informs us:

> A contract is an agreement between parties, creating mutual obligations that are enforceable by law. The basic elements required for the agreement to be a legally enforceable contract are:

5 Comments of the Authors Guild, Inc., *In the Matter of Impact of Artificial Intelligence ("AI") Technologies on Copyright* (Docket Number: 2019-23638).

> mutual assent, expressed by a valid offer and acceptance; adequate consideration; capacity; and legality.[6]

To give assent or to approve of something independently is not a task AI can lawfully conduct or do without human involvement. It may be able to produce literary work, but AI cannot exercise control over what it may produce. AI cannot agree to do something with the writing it produces, such as, enter into a contract with a publisher to publish it. AI alone cannot enter into publishing contracts. It cannot take responsibility for its work or decide how to use it. This demands and requires the involvement of a human.

For example, a human could command AI to produce a children's book and self-publish it on Amazon. However, it is the human, not AI contracting or doing business with Amazon and the human managing the business of the book. While AI might be the writer, editor, and illustrator of the book, it is not the lawful owner of its content having a legal right to engage in the publishing business to make use of it and obtain royalties. Neither is the human the lawful owner of the AI generated content because content that is primarily AI generated content is not copyrightable. In reality, a human may be profiting off an AI generated product in this example, but there is no copyright or legal ownership of the writing because it was not created by a human.

In exploring how AI might progressively assist humans with negotiating and entering contracts, Eliza Mik concludes in a book chapter, "Once we realize how AI is deployed in practice and acknowledge that many of our commercial decisions are based on the automation of cognitive tasks, we may adopt a less sensationalistic perspective regarding the role of AI in the contracting process." Yet, Mik also states the following:

> Contracting is thus inextricably associated with decision-making. It is here, where we see the deployment of AI in the process or negotiating or, more broadly, entering into contracts. Many factors are involved in making commercial and legal decisions— and AI can assist only with *some* of them. Computer programs can analyze numbers and evaluate probabilities, but they cannot reason about

6 Cornell Law School: Legal Information Institute: Contract https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/contract#

> mental states of the other party or draft clauses that allocate the risks resulting from breach.
>
> The broader point is that, technically, the AI can be involved in the first three stages of information acquisition, analysis and action selection with the human 'only' implementing the decision that was recommended by the AI.
>
> What bears repeating is that computers do not make their 'own' decisions or form their 'own' intention but execute earlier human decisions or manifest human decision in pursuance of human goals.[7]

AI continues to evolve at a rapid pace in assisting humans with contracting, but AI will not likely be able to enter into contracts by itself without the involvement of human decision making. While we are increasingly seeing AI assist, AI is not entering into agreements or contracts alone. AI cannot give mutual assent. AI cannot agree to the terms of a contract because AI does not have its own intentions. AI's intentions are that of the humans' intentions programming it. AI in assisting people with contract formation is carrying out the intentions of the human parties themselves, not its own. Only humans can manifest assent or agreement or intent to contract.

In conclusion, while AI can produce written work it does not possess a copyright in the literary work; it cannot exercise control over the written work and it cannot enter into agreements or contracts with a publisher. Therefore, AI as a creative with a legal right to its work is currently nonexistent.

The Nature of Literature

What is literature? Oxford Languages defines literature as, "written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit." The more challenging question, however, is: What is great literature? This is akin to asking: What is great art? And whatever answer provided will be highly subjective. Yet, there are some aspects of great literature that can be agreed upon and known.

We know the art of storytelling is the art of showing the human experience. It is the observation of human emotions throughout the emotional experience be it happiness, sadness, fear or anger. In its most authentic and powerful form, the story grabs hold of its readers and universally causes them to feel powerful

7 Eliza Mik, *AI in Negotiating & Entering into Contracts*, chapter in a forthcoming book edited by Larry DiMatteo, *AI & Private Law* (July 8, 2021).

emotions when it is not the readers' own life experience. The reason why a story can do this is because humans, and only humans, are living within the circumstances of the human condition wherein they will suffer. Humans do not live without some degree of suffering. Although the level of suffering is relative. The human as a creator first suffers or stands witness to suffering be it an injustice, discrimination, a physical or mental injury, a lost love or maybe the death of a child. The list of circumstances causing suffering is long. The human writer uses the suffering endured to produce great art. Only humans are capable of these strong emotions produced from suffering, which essentially makes them poised to produce the most authentic and moving literature.

Talented and famous authors understand the power of storytelling. Many have commented on it giving us lasting insights found in their quotes about storytelling. Author Joan Didion said, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." Maybe Didion was imparting here that stories instruct us about our humanity and inform us about how to live and enhance our lives. Author Sue Monk Kidd said, "Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here." Kidd seems to be getting at the value of keeping a record, of engaging in the task of writing down events as they happen, creating a historical account allowing for understanding. Again, potentially allowing humans to learn if they are listening. Author Maya Angelou said, "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." Angelou takes it a step further to inform us the act of writing might lead to some form of healing or, at least, some form of a release from what has happened.

These authors were masters at the craft of storytelling. From the timeless literature they produced, they showed us memorable literature makes us feel powerful emotions and is how we learn, remember, heal, and grow. We learn about other humans' life experiences, struggles, and suffering, which we might never even become aware of unless we've engaged in reading literature. Literature gives us the ability to travel, experience different cultures, walk in another's shoes, and understand the alternative realities of other human beings. Literature, at its highest level, is art and art is one of our greatest accomplishments.

To Kill A Mockingbird is Harper Lee's 1961 Pulitzer Prize winning novel that sold over 40 million copies according to an article in *Time* magazine.[8] The book is about a young white girl, Scout Finch, growing up in the Great Depression era in Alabama without a mother and a father who is a local

8 Melissa Fray Greene, "The Story Behind To Kill A Mockingbird," *Time* (February 20, 2016) https://time.com/3947242/life-intro-go-set-a-watchman/.

country lawyer. Her father, Atticus Finch, makes the choice to defend a black man Tom Robinson, accused of raping a white woman, Mayella Ewell. Tom is innocent but found guilty. After the verdict, Tom tries to escape from jail but is shot and killed. While this is happening, Mayella's father, Bob Ewell, assaults Atticus' son, Jem. The town's mysterious character, Boo Bradley, ends up saving Jem and likely killing Bob Ewell. Atticus and Sheriff Tate wonder whether Jem or Boo killed Bob Ewell, but Sheriff Tate decides to report the incident as Bob falling on the knife during the struggle.

Harper Lee's witness to the injustices of the legal system through her closeness with her father, who was also a country lawyer in the south like Atticus, spawned this tale of human suffering. Lee's life experiences, relationships, and environment allowed her to weave an iconic work of literature unique to her vantage point. Whether AI could produce this kind of story in the future is what we are all wondering. It seems some form of human intervention feeding AI the details or promoting the parameters of the story including a framework for experiences, relationships, and environment is required to produce the work. Living the realities of the justice system through her father as well as her experiences growing up in the south provided the foundation for this book. Without this, a similar work would not be as compelling, enduring, or informative about Black American History.

The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank is arguably one of, if not the most, widely read diaries. It details the life of a young girl and her Jewish family who hid during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, showing an exceptionally dark time in human history through the eyes of an innocent. If AI existed in a similar situation such as the Holocaust in our future, could it alone produce a similar work as Anne Frank? I can't answer with certainty whether it can or not, but I believe if it tried, whatever is produced will be missing something salient and authentic.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr is based upon the true story of Sadako Saski, a victim of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan, during World War II, who sets out to create a thousand paper cranes while dying of leukemia as a result of the radiation from the atomic bomb. Saddako, according to *Wikipedia*, died at age 12. Might AI tell her story as well as the Canadian author Eleanor Coerr?

We learned in the first section only humans can claim a copyright to their written work. But what other, if any, requirements are there for the writing itself to be worthy of copyright protection?

According to the federal statute on copyright law, the "Two essential elements—original work and tangible object—must merge through fixation in

order to produce subject matter copyrightable under the statute."[9]

Copyright protection requires both original authorship and the work being fixed in any tangible medium of expression, for writing fixation is easy to understand as writing is fixed, whether in digital or print form. Yet, what does it mean to have an "original work"? Samuels in his book about the history of copyright explains:

> By contrast, under the originality standard of copyright, an author gets a copyright in an independently created work even if the work is similar to a preexisting one, so long as the author did not in fact copy the preexisting work.
>
> Originality does require, however, at least some minimal level of creativity.[10]

Originality is not only a requirement to obtain a copyright, it is also a component of exceptional literature. AI has shown us in the marketplace that it can copy literary styles and produce work appearing to be written in the style of a particular author. Regardless of whether an author cares about obtaining copyright protection for their work or not, an author or creative in the business of writing literature does not put copied writing into the marketplace. Originality or "minimal level of creativity," in the work is expected, otherwise an author can be found to be infringing upon another's work and liable for copyright infringement. Copying is not an option.

But what is it editors look for when reviewing submissions of articles for publication in literary magazines? *The Sun* magazine reports, "We publish personal essays, short stories, and poems by established and emerging writers from all over the world. We encourage submissions from writers whose perspectives are underrepresented in or missing from *The Sun*." This publisher of literature wants what is "missing" from the marketplace of literature, not what is copied. *Iowa Review* states it publishes, "with the intent to help new and emerging writers develop an audience." Again, another publisher declaring they too are seeking the "new," or previously unheard voice. *Tin House* details what their editors are looking for, "*Tin House* expands the boundaries of what great literature can do. Publisher of award-winning books of literary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry; home to a renowned workshop and seminar series;

9 Mary LaFrance, *Copyright Law in a Nutshell* (West Academic Publishing, 2008).
10 Edward Samuels, *The Illustrated Story of Copyright* (Thomas Dune Books, 2000).

and partner of a critically acclaimed podcast, *Tin House* champions writing that is artful, dynamic and original." Again, "original," is used to describe what will be considered worthy of publishing in the literary landscape. These sample descriptions from publishers explaining what they are looking to publish assist in defining worthy literature. All have in common one key ingredient clarifying what it takes to write for a literary magazine—originality.

After we experience suffering of a kind, find the originality or uniqueness in the circumstances writers conclude by showing how they triumphed. Bronwyn Fryer from the *Harvard Business Review* explored what screenwriters know to be a true and powerful motivator, which CEOs looking to market their product or services might not know. Fryer interviewed Robert McKee, a screenwriter lecturer who preaches the best and most effective way to motivate or persuade people, is by telling a compelling story arousing listeners' emotions. However, he cautions them to not paint a rosy picture telling a positive story but to tell a story of struggle, which embraces the darker side of life but shows how a person overcomes these struggles or life circumstances. Ultimately, this story is true to life and produces a positive energy.

McKee explains:

> I can teach the formal principles of stories, but not to a person who hasn't really lived.
>
> The art of storytelling takes intelligence, but it also demands a life experience that I've noted in gifted film directors: the pain of childhood. Childhood trauma forces you into a kind of mild schizophrenia that makes you see life simultaneously in two ways: First, its direct, real-time experience, but at the same moment, your brain records it as material—out of which you will create business ideas, science or art.[11]

AI as a creative cannot experience struggle, suffering, or trauma, allowing it to produce the depths of a story largely limiting its ability as a creative and to ever potentially produce great literature. AI will never experience suffering. AI will never experience emotion. AI will never know empathy. AI will always lack the human life experience that births gifted storytellers. Hence, AI as a creative will always be limited because of this fact.

11 Fryer, Bronwyn, "Storytelling That Moves People," *Harvard Business Review* (June 2003).

Ethical Use of AI in Literature

Jonathan Malesic from *The Atlantic*, in his article entitled, "What ChatGPT Can't Teach My Writing Students," explains why writing is more than learning how to reason. He states the following:

> Just as important, learning to write trains your imagination to construct the person who will read your words. Writing, then, is an ethical act. It puts you in relation to someone you may not know, someone who may, in fact, not yet exist. When you write, you learn to exercise your responsibility to that person, to meet their needs in a context you cannot fully know. That might sound like a lofty goal for a paper about, for instance, the major causes of the American Revolution. But even that bog-standard assignment can get students to anticipate what another person knows and expects. You wouldn't write the same essay to a veteran's group as you would to new immigrants. Writing is never simply self-expression. It's an expression to a specific audience for a specific purpose. In some cases, like a love letter, a writer knows their audience intimately. In others, the audience is every bit a work of the imagination as a novel's characters are.
>
> Still developing this ability to connect with others through the imagination is central to ethical life. The philosopher Mark Johnson argues in his 1993 book, *Moral Imagination*, that ethics is not primarily about applying universal rules to specific situations but about 'the ongoing imaginative exploration of possibilities for dealing with our problems, enhancing the quality of our communal relations, and forming significant personal attachments that grow.' Empathy plays a central role in this model of ethics. We cannot act responsibly towards others unless we 'go out towards people to inhabit their worlds, not just by relational calculations, but also in imagination, feeling, and expression.'
>
> It seems inevitable that large-language models of AI will allow us to offload some of the writing tasks that students learn in school. But we can't allow ourselves to lose the capacity to empathize with

> distant strangers at just the moment when we're more able than ever to communicate with them.[12]

Malesic emphasizes his writing students must learn for themselves how to anticipate the characteristics and values of the audience for the writing being produced, how to connect with the readership of the writing, and ultimately how to produce empathy from readers. This is something a writer does. Is this something AI can effectively be trained to do? As Malesic said, writing is an ethical act because the writer has a responsibility to their readership.

Not all authors see AI as a threat. For example, science-fiction author Tim Boucher reported in *Business Insider* he created almost one hundred books in nine-months using AI as a tool for brainstorming. He is also quoted in *Newsweek* as saying, "AI has proven to be a remarkable catalyst for my creative work. It has enabled me to increase my output while maintaining consistent quality and has allowed me to delve into intricate world-building with an efficiency I could never have achieved otherwise."[13]

Brainstorming is a different function than authoring. Using AI to assist in enhancing a description of a particular setting in time or historical time period, or about a certain type of character is arguably an invaluable and ethical use of AI for writers. This can be viewed as a resource akin to using a dictionary, thesaurus, or style guide when writing. A human author is still going to put together the story, draft, redraft, edit, and polish until the work is of publishable quality. It is what writers do. It is the ethical thing to do. I can't believe a professional writer would believe it is acceptable and ethical to direct AI to write, rewrite, edit, rewrite, illustrate, design and produce a book by itself without significant intervention and direction given by the writer and simply call it their own. This is an unethical use of AI. Moreover, if the writer did use AI in this manner to do every task that goes into writing a book without much oversight by a human, the result is not intellectual property the human writer can legally call its own as we've seen in the first part of this article discussing the US Copyright Office's practice and guidance.

The publishing industry is determining where AI will stand as a creative. It's figuring out what an ethical use of AI looks like. *Literary Hub* explored the positive aspects of collaborating with AI in Debbie Urbanski's article. She explains, "In a way, when we talk with GPT-4, we're talking to ourselves. At the

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12 Jonathan Malesic, "What ChatGPT Can't Teach My Writing Students," *The Atlantic* (Feb 2023).

13 Nolan, Beatrice, "Sci-fi author says he wrote 97 books in 9 months using AI tools, including ChatGPT and Midjourney," *Business Insider* (May 22, 2023).

same time, we're talking to our past, to words we've already written or typed or said. At the same time, we are talking with our future, portions of which are unimaginable. As a writer, I find that the most exciting of all."[14] Her perspective is seeing AI as a collaboration, each human and computer feeding off each other, but not AI or the machine acting alone.

Authors A.I. is a Florida based company reporting it was created in 2020 by over one hundred bestselling authors wishing to create its own version of AI as an assistant to writers providing feedback about plot, character, voice, and more. Feedback also seems to fall in line with brainstorming and collaboration as discussed in the previous paragraphs making for examples of ethical uses of AI. But, for some, the lines still seem blurry.

The Authors Guild gives writers or creatives the clearest guidance. In an article entitled, "AI Best Practices for Authors," it explains ethical use and best practices:

> Do not use AI to write for you. Use it only as a tool—a paintbrush for writing. It is your writing, thinking, and voice that make you the writer that you are. AI-generated text is not your authorship and not your voice. Even if trained on your own work, AI-generated text is simply a regurgitation of what it is trained on and adds nothing new or original to the world. By definition, it is neither original or art. When you use AI to generate text that you include in a work, you are not writing you are—prompting.[15]

Greg Bensinger in writing for *Thomson Reuters* reports:

> There were over 200 e-books in Amazon's Kindle store as of mid-February listing ChatGPT as an author or co-author, including 'How to Write and Create Content Using ChatGPT,' 'The Power of Homework' and a poetry collection 'Echoes of the Universe." And the number is rising daily. There is even a new-subgenre on Amazon: Books about using ChatGPT, written entirely by ChatGPT.

14 Urbanski, Debbie, "Why Novelists Should Embrace Artificial Intelligence," *Literary Hub* (December 8, 2023).

15 Authors Guild, "AI Best Practices for Authors," authorsguild.com (April 9, 2024) https://authorsguild.org/resource/ai-best-practices-for-authors/.

> But due to the nature of ChatGPT and many author's failure to disclose, it is nearly impossible to get a full accounting of how many e-books may be written by AI.
>
> Now ChatGPT appears ready to upend the staid book industry as would-be novelists and self-help gurus looking to make a quick buck are turning to software to help create bot-made e-books and publish them through Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing arm. Illustrated children's books are a favorite for such first-time authors. On YouTube, TikTok and Reddit hundreds of tutorials have sprung up, demonstrating how to make a book in a few hours.[16]

The humans behind these 200 or more e-books are not involved much at all. The article talks about an individual who dreamed about being a published writer and how he created an illustrated children's book in a matter of hours, which he offered for sale with Amazon's self-publishing unit. His wish was granted. AI allows him to call himself a children's author. This being the complete opposite end of the spectrum of using AI, and an unethical use. Still, this author had to determine the message of the children's book even if AI was responsible for writing, editing, illustrating, and producing it.

Just because AI can produce a literary work at a human author's command, we must ask: Do we want to delegate this task to AI at any point in our future? Do we see value in literature almost entirely produced by a machine? The marketplace has already provided a response to these questions in terms of showing what sells. It appears the market is currently saturated with low-quality AI content on Amazon. I don't believe any book to date entirely generated by AI has graced *The New York Times* bestseller list of books. This does not render AI as a creative successful.

Conclusion

Only human authors have rights and control over their literary work in the form of copyrights and can make decisions on how to use their work. Only human authors may enter into contracts allowing them to publish their work. Only human authors can engage in the business of being a writer. AI cannot. While AI can create some, it cannot produce work born of enduring human

16 Bensinger, Greg, "ChatGPT launches in AI-written e-books on Amazon," *Thomson Reuters* (February 21, 2023).

circumstances, overcoming hardships, and suffering. Hence, whatever AI will produce as a creative is going to be limited because AI will never live the human experience.

AI can and is being used as a tool. Some writers embrace it, while some do not. Passing off AI produced work as one's own is clearly unethical, but from there, how ethical a collaboration with AI is can get a little fuzzy. Research akin to using Google as a research tool and brainstorming are ethical uses, but future research in determining best practices might be warranted.

In our excitement of initially discovering all AI can do, the marketplace has spoken to some extent. Reading great literature, maybe some of what is deemed classic or award winning literature, no matter if it is a story which is found to be exceptional, is likely so because it forces us to first feel profound emotions and teaches us something outside our own life experience.

Learning through storytelling creates empathy in the readers themselves. It is part of the reason why the writer writes. AI cannot write with originality born of human suffering. Its newly produced prompting of color is void of authenticity. The art of storytelling is the art of showing the human experience. In its greatest form and purpose, human authored literature plays a role in creating better humans. The status of AI as a creative has largely been answered by the US Copyright Office and the marketplace which is currently showing us AI's work cannot compete with Stephen King.

However, if this should ever shift, and it seems we have delegated or recognized AI as a creative, we may run the risk of only partially living because we are no longer fully learning, as Didion explained, not remembering who we are, or why we're here, as Kidd informed, and we certainly won't be telling all the stories that need to be told, as Angelou imparted. Instead, we will be leaving the legacy of our most authentic stories—untold.

Employment of Students in a University Library's Publishing Unit

A Case Study

By Kyle Morgan MLIS and Kaitlyn O'Dell M.A.

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 & Attewell, 2019). The discrepancies are partly due to the type of employment studied. Part-time,

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.

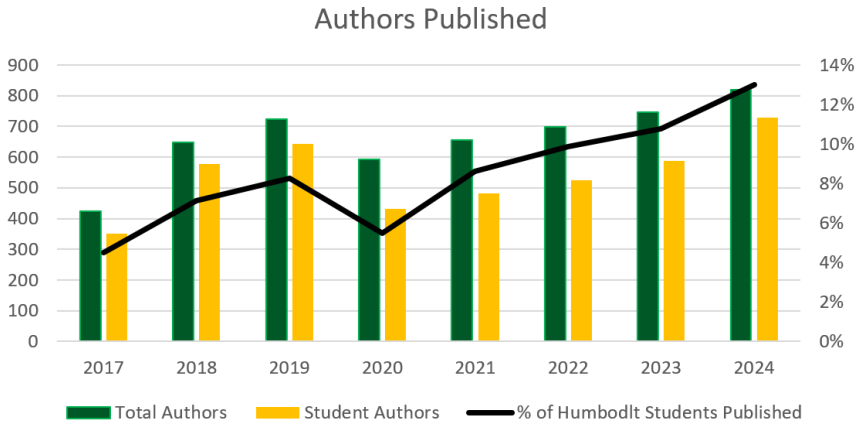
Capacity, marketing, and student opportunities

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.



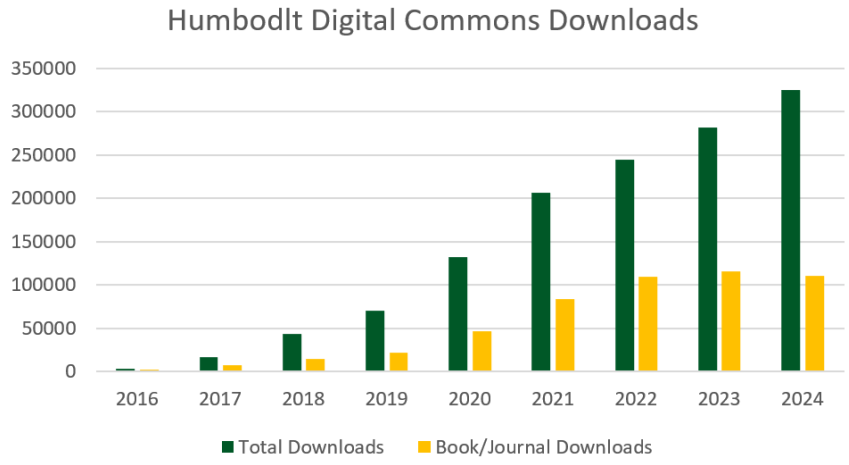
A number of the press's authors speak in classrooms, at campus events, and in the community, improving the educational experience for all students and community members. For example, the collaborative publication *Oaxaca y más allá, microrelatos bilingües del corazón* brought Oaxacan authors to campus 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 capitalisitic 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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Author Bio

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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

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- 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/

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 **E**xcellence in **P**ublishing, **I**nformation Technology, and **C**ommunications, 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.

John W. Warren is Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in Publishing, College of Professional Studies, George Washington University; founder and publisher of the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*; organizer of the GW Ethics in Publishing Conference; and founder and co-organizer of the Student Journal Symposium for Literary and Research Publications

Legal Analysis

Bartz v. Anthropic PBC

By Savannah Aleksic

Issue Statement

Everyone has a different stance on the topic of Artificial Intelligence (AI), especially as it continues to ebb its way into every facet of our online existence. AI uses a learning model designed to "learn from experience, identify patterns, and make decisions based on large volumes of data."[1] Our topic of discussion today is Anthropic, an AI startup company founded in 2021 by several former employees of OpenAI. The case came about when a group of authors sued Anthropic in August 2024 in a class-action lawsuit, claiming that it illegally pirated copies of their books from Library Genesis (LibGen) and Pirate Library Mirror (PiLiMi) as tools to train its AI model.

Background

The AI company Anthropic has developed a large group of language models they refer to as Claude, which the company describes "aren't programmed directly by humans—instead, they're trained on large amounts of data."[2] This is common practice for most AI systems. Think of an AI library collection as a kraken extending its tentacles in its reach to consume large amounts of information. In this case, the data was derived from copyrighted books, sourced from pirated sites.

The lawsuit was brought in the Northern District of California. The nonfiction authors Charles Graeber (*The Good Nurse*), Kirk Wallace Johnson (*The Feather Thief*), and thriller author Andrea Bartz (*We Were Never Here*) filed

1 https://csuglobal.edu/blog/how-does-ai-actually-work
2 https://www.anthropic.com/research/tracing-thoughts-language-model

the lawsuit against Anthropic. The copyrighted content included books that Anthropic purchased, scanned to create digital versions, and then destroyed. It is alleged that Anthropic also used over seven million digital copies of books acquired from pirating sites LibGen and PiLiMi to train its Claude LLMs. Plaintiffs sought damages and injunctive relief, as they claimed that Anthropic violated copyright law. In response, Anthropic maintained that their practices fell within the confines of fair use and, furthermore, were essential to the development of competitive AI technologies.

In June 2025, the court found two of Anthropic's accused activities were fair use: first, training Claude on plaintiffs' books was described as "exceedingly transformative", and second, digitizing purchased print books. The judge ruled "on summary judgment that using books without permission to train AI was fair use if they were acquired legally, but he denied Anthropic's request for summary judgment related to piracy—finding that the piracy was not fair use."[3]

In July, the court certified that all rightsholders of books acquired by Anthropic from LibGen and PiLiMi were registered with the U.S. Copyright Office and have ISBN or ASIN numbers. Since the books were pirated, this created a permanent, general-purpose library in their AI model that was not itself justifiable as being fair use. A trial was later scheduled to determine Anthropic's potential liability for piracy.

> Judge Alsup found that any potential market harm would be no different than the harm caused by using the works for "training schoolchildren to write well," which could "result in an explosion of competing works." Judge Alsup stated that training "is not the kind of competitive or creative displacement that concerns the Copyright Act."
>
> The court also concluded, "Anthropic had no entitlement to use pirated copies for its central library [the dataset used to train Claude]. Creating a permanent, general-purpose library was not itself a fair use excusing Anthropic's piracy.[4]

Since the books were registered with the U.S. Copyright Office in a timely manner, Judge Alsup determined that the millions of works downloaded were done so in an unlawful manner, and that Anthropic's obtainance of the works

3 https://authorsguild.org/advocacy/artificial-intelligence/what-authors-need-to-know-about-the-anthropic-settlement/

4 https://www.bakerlaw.com/bartz-v-anthropic/

from piracy sites may "erode the defense", even in the context of using it to train an AI language model.[5]

In the settlement hearing on September 22nd, plaintiffs filed a supplemental brief that supported a motion for preliminary approval of a class settlement. This was in response to Anthropic's agreement to pay a $1.5B settlement earlier in the month. In the settlement, the sum amount for each work would amount to a gross recovery of $3,000 per author. Due to the division of subsidiary rights, the authors will end up splitting 50/50 with their respective publishers, so authors will only take home around $1,500 from the settlement. Judge Alsup expressed his discomfort with this settlement, as there were still important questions that had been left unanswered. People have a right to be concerned, as there has not been any proper legislation put in place to protect copyright holders when it comes to their work being used by a corporation to further advance their AI systems. We need to have a serious discussion and enact legislation to combat these issues to protect creators before more AI companies use immoral practices to their own advantage.

Argument/Opinion

While Anthropic's AI training methods are challenging our conventional ideas of fair use, the court's ruling has exposed an urgent ethical failure within our legal framework. This emphasizes an alarming precedent for the future of authorship in favor of innovation. One of the ethical considerations in using copyrighted material to train AI systems arises when the AI uses that information to create poetry, as part of Anthropic's "AI biology" research findings. A concern would stem from the idea that a language model could consume a creative work, without permission, and use the artistic and linguistic inspiration from that work to create its own structures for publication rewards.

On the contrary, some may assert that AI systems trained using data aren't much different than if you or I were to read Shakespeare and then write poetry using our newfound knowledge of poetic structure. However, AI training models are still just lines of code. AI may be able to replicate rhyme patterns and learn from literary works, but it does not have the one fundamental element essential in all forms of art: the human experience. AI artwork hinders the original copyrighted person's creative liberties for monetary profit. If an

5 https://www.insidetechlaw.com/blog/2025/09/bartz-v-anthropic-settlement-reached-after-landmark-summary-judgment-and-class-certification

AI system is allowed to use pirated creative works to further its own writing capabilities, is the AI work then considered the copyright material of the AI creator?

While many in the publishing community remain cautious on regular AI usage, whether for climate or moral reasons, there can be benefits in publishing fundamentals. As the ACSM (American College of Sports Medicine) describes, "Editors, editorial boards, publishers, and researchers will need to collaborate to ensure that AI tools are used responsibly, with appropriate safeguards in place to protect the authenticity of scientific research, uphold the quality of peer review, and ensure the fair treatment of all authors and reviewers."[6] AI is a strong and useful tool that can be utilized for more efficient and effective business practices, but it can also cause significant harm.

Conclusion

Just earlier this year, The United States District Court for Delaware rejected a fair use defense to the use of copyrighted works to train a natural language processing AI system in *Thomson Reuters Enterprise Centre GMBH v. Ross Intelligence Inc*.[7] This should become the norm, as AI companies should be held to the same standards and ethical practices as everyone else, perhaps even more so.

It is no secret that the emergence of AI in publishing raises a number of concerns with transparency, accountability, and sustaining fairness in scholarship and creativity. At $1.5 billion, *Bartz v. Anthropic* is now officially the largest U.S. copyright settlement in history. Not only is this an example of artists not being rewarded for their work financially, but the lack of accountability in AI companies provides an unhealthy environment going forward. Once we start diminishing meaningful authorship in favor of furthering technological advancement, we will only be pushing ourselves away from the authentic stories and experiences that make publishing so important.

6 https://acsm.org/ai-ethics/

7 https://www.reedsmith.com/en/perspectives/2025/03/court-ai-fair-use-thomson-reuters-enterprise-gmbh-ross-intelligence

Interviews

Publishing Professional Interview

Jessicah A. Jensen

Biography

Jessicah A. Jensen is in her second year of the MPS in Publishing program, and serves as the Marketing Lead for the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* (GWJEP) at George Washington University, where she combines her passions for publishing, communication, and ethical inquiry. Originally from Utah and now based in Boston, she earned her Bachelor's degree before spending five years working as a paralegal—an experience that deepened her appreciation for integrity, precision, and the power of language to shape justice and understanding. The publishing industry has always had a place in her heart, and it only seemed right to pursue a career in it. Her transition into publishing reflects her conviction that stories and scholarship can serve as catalysts for change. At the GWJEP, she is dedicated to amplifying diverse voices and exploring the intersection of technology and ethics in modern publishing. When she is not crafting campaigns or connecting readers with new ideas, she enjoys discovering local bookstores, learning from peers, and championing accessible, thoughtful discourse—one publication at a time.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

This is such a loaded question! It means many things to me. Ethics in publishing involves recognizing that every editorial and business decision carries cultural responsibility. The industry is not just about producing and distributing content. I believe you cannot have the publishing industry without ethics, as they go hand in hand. Our industry is about shaping stories, voices, and ideas that define how we understand ourselves and others. Ethical publishing requires commitment to integrity, transparency, and inclusivity at every stage of the process. At its core, ethics in publishing is about stewardship, being a careful, conscious participant in the circulation of knowledge, stories, and identities. This entails understanding that publishing is not neutral and choosing to act in ways that promote empathy, justice, and intellectual honesty. Everyone may view these issues differently, which is part of the industry's beauty.

What recent ethical topics in publishing are you interested in and why?

There are many ethical issues in publishing, but one that interests me most is editorial independence, the effect of political pressure, and censorship. There is a strong trend of publishers in academic or trade sectors and editors being caught between legal risks, public opinion, staff pressures, and political forces. An example of this is publications being dropped or delayed because of perceived ideological conflicts or similar pressures from governments. There is a lot of tension between managing risk and advocating for certain views. This topic is very personal to me because I have extensive experience in the legal field, and witnessing what is happening in our industry right now makes me more aware of what might be being hidden or suppressed in publications.

How would you describe your experience with the journal? What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

My experience with the journal so far has been outstanding! I enjoy it immensely, and every moment I spend working on it feels incredibly rewarding. I've appreciated the chance to gain more practical experience and deepen my knowledge in the field of publishing, especially in the area of marketing. Leading the marketing team has been a particularly enjoyable aspect of my involvement, as it allows me to apply creative strategies to promote our journal effectively. I've taken great pride in helping to develop and implement innovative ways.

Our marketing committee has launched some engaging social media segments, such as interactive polls, behind-the-scenes content, and member spotlights, which are all aimed at attracting more audience members and increasing engagement with our journal. Blending my passion for publishing and social media has truly been a rewarding experience, and I am excited about the potential for further growth. I would love to see the journal continue to expand its social media presence across multiple platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, to reach a broader audience and attract even more high-quality submissions from diverse authors worldwide. I believe that with continued effort and innovative ideas, the journal can establish a stronger digital footprint and become a leading voice in our field.

How has ethics in publishing influenced your job/career/profession? How has it influenced your education/learning?

Ethics in publishing have affected my profession in several ways. I have worked as a paralegal for over six years, and I have noticed significant impacts, for example, in the areas of transparency and accountability in legal information. Ethical standards have pushed the legal industry to become more transparent in how legal information is created, edited, and distributed. Legal publishers must now maintain strict accuracy and citation ethics, as their content directly impacts case outcomes, compliance, and the policymaking process. This is just the tip of the iceberg of how the ethics in publishing affect so much around us. It has also impacted my education and learning by shaping the quality, reliability, and diversity of the information I encounter daily. By fact-checking content, crediting authors properly, and avoiding plagiarism, I can learn from trustworthy, well-balanced materials that include diverse perspectives. On the other hand, unethical publishing also has an impact on the spread of false information, exploitation of creators, or silencing marginalized voices, which can distort my education, limiting what I can learn and how I understand the world.

Is there an ethics in publishing topic that you've not seen tackled by the journal that you'd like to see covered?

Yes, there are several issues. One that I am personally noticing is the lack of disability representation and advocacy in the publishing industry. There is a significant lack of education and responsibility within the industry regarding disability representation. Something needs to change, starting with better education on how to effectively advocate for these individuals. Another rising

topic is fanfiction, as many fanfiction authors are transitioning to traditional publishing, and it appears we are beginning to revisit the guidelines related to fanfiction. I could keep going! I have so many ethical topics that cross my mind every day.

As the Lead for the Marketing Committee, how do you ensure that the marketing committee upholds the journal's ethical mission?

As the Marketing Committee lead, I must ensure our team follows and upholds the journal's ethical mission. I do this by regularly emphasizing our mission and making sure we stay true to it. Our team's progress depends on this mission. We also ensure that every marketing campaign aligns with the mission so anyone who sees our content can understand it clearly. Additionally, I have worked closely with John Warren to understand his goals for the journal and have made sure to adhere to them.

Publishing Professional Interview

Gwendolyn Harrison

Biography

Gwendolyn Harrison is in her second year in the MPS in Publishing program at George Washington University, and she is currently serving as the Editorial Committee Lead for the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*. She graduated from the University of Mary Washington with a bachelor's degree in English and Spanish in 2022 and has been working full-time as a copywriter and editor in the DC area ever since.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

To me, ethics in publishing is all about setting the highest standards for transparency, integrity, diversity, and reliability in the publishing world. I feel that if publishers raise these standards for themselves, they will not only attract more authors but also a wider audience.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

I am still very new to the journal, but so far I am loving how communicative everyone is from every committee. It is also empowering to see everyone being so excited about working on this latest edition. I have really enjoyed getting to know the rest of the Editorial Committee, as well as the other committee leads and seeing how everybody's collaborative efforts move the journal forward.

What drew you to the Editorial Committee?

I was primarily drawn to the Editorial Committee because I aspire to be a copywriter and an editor for magazines and book publishers. I am currently working as a copywriter for a business consulting firm and am really enjoying that experience. However, I wanted to gain hands-on experience with editing for a publication and knew that working with this committee would be an excellent way to do so.

What are the biggest ethical concerns you consider when editing a piece that has been submitted to the journal?

I am a very vocal critic of the unethical use of AI in most professional settings, especially in publishing. In fact, I am doing my Ethics in Publishing capstone project on this very subject. As somebody who works with AI every day in my 9 to 5 job, I've seen firsthand how it can really become a problem by creating copy with inaccurate or redundant information, not considering context, or completely plagiarizing other studies and articles. I think we are seeing this becoming a persistent issue in the publishing industry. While selecting and editing new manuscripts for the journal, I want to make sure that we are keeping the process as human as possible from our end. If committee members feel that AI can help save them time, it's certainly something that I think we should be open to. However, I think it is still critically important that the final products are always looked over and edited by us.

What type of articles or submissions are you generally most excited to work on, and why do you enjoy them the most?

I am very excited to work on submissions that tackle the issue of diversity within the publishing industry. I think that this is such an important subject, especially now, and I am curious to see all of the different ways that authors will discuss it in their work. I would enjoy working on these the most because I think there are so many different lenses that we can look at this issue through, such as acquisition processes, representation in publishing houses, or cover design, to name a few. I am very excited to see what authors have to say about this.

Are there lessons you've learned working with the journal that you will carry forward into your publishing career?

Absolutely. My experience with the GWJEP is helping me to understand the production flow of a real journal from editing manuscripts all the way to publication. I am seeing just how many small but critical steps are involved and it has really given me much more respect and appreciation for the process. I will definitely carry this with me as I move forward in my career.

Publishing Professional Interview

Cecilia Gray

Biography

Cecilia Gray is a Production Editor at Simon & Schuster, Director of Operations at Inkluded, and Managing Editor of the *Journal of Ethics in Publishing*. She is currently earning her Master's in Publishing at George Washington University. She brings a passion for inclusive storytelling and ethical industry practices to her work and is honored to work with organizations that share her passion.

Can you describe your role as Managing Editor, and what it means to you?

I always say that a managing editor is the publishing equivalent of a project manager. They set priorities, maintain publishing schedules, liaise with all active parties in the publishing process, and oversee their projects at every step. And that's exactly what I do in my role. I work closely with the *GWJEP*'s editor-in-chief and all its committees to set achievable goals and priorities for each issue. I support our Content, Editorial, Marketing, E-Publishing, and Strategy and Sustainability committees in their work to achieve journal goals, and I aim to foster a sense of community amongst all journal members as well as the larger university community.

I'm really fortunate to be in this role because it means that I get to work

with so many amazing people and to help chart the future course of this impactful and much-needed journal.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

Ethics are a crucial consideration in all facets of life, but publishing is specifically personal to me. Beyond being someone in the publishing industry, I am a product of it. Books, like any form of media, have the power to shape society, preserve history, and influence new generations. They have profoundly impacted the person I am today. For that reason, I firmly believe the media we consume should reflect the full diversity of our society. Likewise, the people involved in creating that media—not just editors and authors, but also paper suppliers, copy editors, cover designers, sales representatives, policymakers, and everyone else who contributes—should embody a balanced and ethical system. Ethics in publishing means being mindful of the impact that every book, even the smallest, 32-page picture book, can have on our society presently and in the future.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

Working with the journal has been a very rewarding experience. This semester, we have several new members, including myself, which means we have a wealth of new and experienced perspectives. As we are currently preparing for our next issue, the *GWJEP* team has been having rich discussions of how we want to grow, how we want to solicit perspectives on emerging topics, and what legacy we want to leave behind. These conversations have led to amazing ideas that we're excited to begin working on, and I feel lucky to work alongside so many other passionate individuals.

How has ethics influenced your career? How has it influenced your education?

Ethics has guided both my academic and professional decisions by serving as a framework for how I approach responsibility, fairness, and accountability. In my education, I've sought to understand not just technical knowledge but also the social impact of ideas—how theory translates into practice and affects people's lives. In my career, ethics has influenced how I interact with colleagues, make choices about projects, and define what success looks like. It reminds me that outcomes matter not only in terms of efficiency or profit, but also in terms of equity, transparency, and the long-term effects on individuals and communities.

What ethical topics are you interested in?

I'm especially interested in questions of equity, representation, and access—who gets opportunities, whose voices are heard, and how systemic barriers can be addressed. I'm also drawn to discussions of professional responsibility: how individuals balance personal integrity with organizational goals. More broadly, I'm interested in the ethics of emerging technologies, privacy, and the responsibility of institutions to create inclusive environments where diverse perspectives can thrive.

What do you hope to see from the journal in the future?

I am excited to see the journal grow as a thought leader that not only publishes scholarship on ethics in publishing but also sparks conversations that ripple outward into classrooms, conferences, and industry practices. Ethics in publishing doesn't stop at just how books are published; it also covers the systematic decisions that lead to industry standards that are shared across businesses. I hope we get to see more submissions that expand the conversation.

Publishing Professional Interview:

Alexus Wall

Biography

Alexus Wall serves as the Content Committee Lead for the *George Washington University Journal of Ethics in Publishing*. Transitioning into the publishing field from a background in law and risk management, she brings a distinctive lens of ethical reasoning, structure, and accountability to creative storytelling. In her role, Alexus has expanded the journal's content beyond traditional book reviews to include author interviews, roundtable discussions, legal analyses, and case studies that explore the evolving intersection of ethics and publishing. She also collaborates with the Marketing Committee to produce digital-first content that reaches readers beyond the printed page. A writer at heart, Alexus is passionate about crafting experiences that connect readers to authentic voices and meaningful conversations.

What recent ethical topics in publishing are you interested in and why?

I'm deeply interested in the ethics of representation and how publishing approaches diversity not just as a numbers goal, but as a matter of authenticity,

agency, and equity. It's not enough to include diverse voices; we have to ask how those voices are being included, who is making editorial decisions, and whose comfort dictates what stories are told.

As a Black woman with an invisible disability and a background in law, I'm especially drawn to the ethical intersections of identity, accessibility, and power. I've experienced firsthand how invisibility, whether racial, physical, or systemic, can silence perspectives that deserve to be centered. That's why I believe ethical publishing must go beyond performative inclusion. It should mean creating structures that honor the full humanity of storytellers, giving them the freedom to tell their truths without compromise or translation. To me, the future of ethical publishing depends on how bravely we handle differences and how willing we are to listen when stories challenge comfort, rather than reinforce it. That's where real progress begins.

What do you enjoy most about working on content, and how do you feel it contributes to the journal's mission?

What I enjoy most is the art of shaping ideas into something that moves people. Writing, editing, and curating content feels like orchestrating small acts of discovery; each piece invites readers to sit with an ethical question and reflect on its meaning. I love that part of the process: creating experiences that are both introspective and human. It's not just about delivering information; it's about sparking connection and conversation. That's how I believe our work advances the journal's mission–by transforming ethics from a distant concept into something various types of readers can access and digest.

How do you manage the schedule and/or time between interviews, book reviews, and other responsibilities in the committee?

Let's just say I've learned to live by my Google Calendar and my color-coded spreadsheets. Organization is my creative superpower; it gives me space to actually be creative. I treat our publishing cycle much like a newsroom: structured, but flexible. A shared content tracker keeps everyone aligned on progress and deadlines, while open communication allows us to adapt as needed. Delegation and trust are key; I encourage members to take ownership of their projects while maintaining oversight to support balance and cohesion across the committee's work. Each project supports the other: book reviews feed the interviews, interviews inspire roundtables, and roundtables generate new questions for analysis or the reverse. I remind the

content committee (and myself) that we're not machines, we're thinkers, writers, and collaborators. So, when timelines blur, I focus on progress over perfection, trusting that authentic content takes the time it needs to breathe.

How do ethics apply to content creation for the GWJEP and in other areas of publishing?

Ethics are the foundation of everything we do. They show up in the choices we make, whose voices we amplify, how we frame stories, and how we handle mistakes. Coming from a legal background, I tend to see ethics as both principle and practice: it's not just about avoiding harm, it's about doing justice to the truth. In publishing, that means making room for authenticity for authors and readers alike. Ethical storytelling isn't sterile; it's alive, textured, and sometimes uncomfortable. But that's where the real conversations happen, and that's exactly where I want our journal to live.

In your opinion, should practical considerations, such as popularity, ever outweigh ethical concerns in deciding what content to create?

In short: no. Popularity might drive clicks or readership in the short term, but compromising integrity undermines trust. That said, I think we can present ethical topics in engaging ways through narrative storytelling, visual media, or digital formats without diluting the substance. We can make the hard questions magnetic. The goal isn't to sacrifice ethics for trends, but to make ethics compelling enough to stand alongside them.

What lessons have you learned that you want to carry forward into your publishing career?

I've learned that good leadership and publishing requires both structure and compassion. My legal background taught me to think critically, but publishing has taught me to think creatively. Managing multiple content types has taught me how to balance structure with flexibility and how to support people through clear communication. I want to carry forward an unwavering commitment to creating honest, human-centered work that respects both the craft and the conscience of publishing. And I want to maintain the mindset to stay reflective and responsive as the industry continues to evolve.

What are your hopes for the future of the Content Committee as the journal continues to grow and evolve?

My hope is that the Content Committee continues to be a space for innovation and collaboration–not just a section of the journal, but a creative lab where ideas and formats experiment freely. I want us to keep collaborating across committees, exploring multimedia storytelling, and giving space to voices that don't often get heard in academic publishing. I look forward to exploring creative and accessible ways to spark discussion around ethics in publishing. For me, it's about making content that resonates, offering readers a space where they feel both challenged and inspired. In doing so, I hope to help strengthen the journal's role in the broader publishing community and remind people that ethics isn't just a policy, it's a pulse. Ultimately, I want the committee to remain a model for how thoughtful, ethical publishing can evolve in real time.

Ethics in Ink

A Conversation with Kate Gavino, Author of ***A Career in Books: A Novel about Friends, Money, and the Occasional Duck Bun***

Interview conducted by Savannah Aleksic, Content Committee Member, GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

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Introduction

The bonds of friendship and personal ethos can be the driving force behind one's survival. In *A Career in Books,* Kate Gavino uses her own experience working in publishing as an Asian-American woman living in one of the biggest cities in the world. Gavino uses humor and honest depictions of the publishing industry to confront questions of who gets to tell which stories and how the industry's structural inequities shape these narratives.

We spoke over Zoom – Kate in France and I in Florida. Kate was sincere as we spoke about her experiences working in the publishing industry as an editorial assistant and an author. The backdrop of the book's location in New York City mirrors the industry with its charming but challenging landscape for young professionals to navigate. Likewise, Gavino expertly folds in humor through simplistic illustrations of our heroines to convey the power of

sisterhood across generations.

What follows is an edited excerpt from our conversation, condensed for clarity and length.

On Realism vs Idealism in Publishing

GWJEP: How does your novel contribute to conversations on the realities of working in the publishing industry? What do you hope readers gain from reading this novel?

> "The biggest perk for me was all the free books. … That was always the connecting thread— my friends, or my coworkers, kind of made the work more bearable."
>
> —GAVINO ON THE REALITY OF WORKING IN PUBLISHING

Kate Gavino: I think it contributes to the conversation just because it was inspired by my perspective as a young Asian-American woman working as an editorial assistant, primarily based on the years I worked in publishing from 2011 to 2016.

The book in that sense is like a time capsule. When I reread it, I am able to gauge how much has changed because I still have a couple of friends who work in publishing. It's interesting to see how their experiences have changed since we started working together when we were all editorial assistants. Some of them are editors now, some of them have a couple of assistants, and some have left publishing completely.

GWJEP: One thing I noticed while reading the book was the realism, which was refreshing in response to the typical glamorized view of publishing we see in films.

Kate Gavino: I appreciate that you mentioned the realism of the novel, because when you're actually working in publishing, it's not glamorous. The biggest perk for me was all the free books. But that doesn't always make up for the extremely low

salary and the grunt work that you're mostly doing day in and day out. I think that's one of the biggest things I wanted to portray in the book. The second equal biggest thing was the friendships the three girls shared because, kind of a common thread even in my non-publishing jobs, what made the work valuable and worth staying was my fellow coworkers and the bond that we had. That was always the connecting thread—my friends, or my coworkers, kind of made the work more bearable.

On Character and Identity

Gavino's reflections on workplace ethics naturally led to a discussion about creative identity and representation.

GWJEP: *A Career in Books* centers around three protagonists, four if you include Veronica Vo. They're all very independent, strong-spoken, Asian-American women trying to make it big in the publishing industry. How important was it for you to have these characters represented in the forefront of the book?

Kate Gavino: I think that hearing stories from the Asian-American diaspora is important and it's worth seeking out, but at the same time, when I set out to write this story I wasn't thinking about representation. The three characters were just inspired by my own experiences working in different publishing companies. In the book, Shirin works for an academic publisher, Nina worked for what was, at the time, a big six publisher, and Sylvia works for a small indie press, and those were my experiences. I really just wanted to portray the spectrum of publishers in terms of size and various company cultures.

The character Veronica Vo was inspired by various female authors that I really admired. The biggest inspiration was an English author named Anita Brookner, who I felt like never really got her flowers while she was alive, but now after she's died, more people are discovering her work. If other Asian-American or Filipino readers find the story because of that, I hope that they appreciate it.

GWJEP: On the topic of Veronica, you did touch on this a little bit but what inspired you to focus a book around Veronica, a nonagenarian character along with the three twenty-something roommates. What inspired you to write that dynamic?

Kate Gavino: I mentioned she was inspired by some authors that I really admire like Anita Brookner or Louisa May Alcott or Eileen Chang. But another reason I did want to include a character like her is representation. I feel like as both an author and someone who has worked in publishing, I got to see it from both sides. When you're on the publishing side you think about how a book should be marketed to sell. In that sense representation became a marketing tool which is a way to pigeonhole certain writers to only write one certain type of story. With Veronica's story, her first novel is about the Vietnam War and as a Vietnamese writer that's what her publisher wanted her to continue writing. But she just wanted to write smaller domestic dramas because that's what truly interested her, but at the time, her publisher couldn't find her audience.

I think that more and more people are having this conversation because no group is a monolith and no group of people want to write the exact same type of story. I wanted to not exactly have her as a cautionary tale, but show the frustrations of wanting to write about your identity. The three young girls find that relatable because they too are feeling pigeonholed in their own roles in seeing the limitations of publishing as well. It's an interesting parallel between the younger and older generation.

On Publishing Ethics

As our conversation shifted more towards ethics, Gavino reflected on the systematic inequalities that define entry-level publishing.

GWJEP: What does ethics and publishing mean to you and have you gained a new perspective since becoming a published author?

Kate Gavino: When I think about ethics and publishing, I think about it 1) in the sense of the publishers and their responsibility about what to, and what not to publish, and 2) their responsibility to their employees, which I think is what my book focuses on the most. When I was working in publishing this conversation [on ethics] was kind of starting to gain more traction, and has much more since then.

Publishing is very insular and closed off. You have these low starting salaries and all the jobs are based in one of the most expensive cities in the country. There is not a very diverse crowd of people applying for these jobs, or who stay beyond the assistant position. As an industry, it seemed like an impossible spot to grow in. When I talk to my friends in publishing now, the

salaries are definitely different, and change is slow and hard to come by. As an author, I see how slow it is to get something published and how slow it is to move things along.

GWJEP: That does lend to, in the book, where one of the girls experiences a mass layoff. After that, she decided that she didn't want to work in publishing anymore.

> "No group is a monolith and no group of people want to write the exact same type of story."
>
> —GAVINO ON RACIAL PIGEONHOLING

Kate Gavino: I heavily fictionalized most things, but that specific scene where she gets laid off with a group of other editorial assistants, that exact thing happened to me, and that was also my last publishing job. That ultimately led me to leave publishing.

That was just that specific company in that specific time, but it was a very disheartening experience, and the fact that it mostly happened to the entry-level assistants was kind of telling of that company's ethics.

GWJEP: What advice would you give to either new authors or business professionals based around recent ethical concerns that you've noticed in the publishing industry?

Kate Gavino: For those entering on the publishing side, something that I remember as a young editorial assistant is that a lot of times when you're hired, they really appreciate the fact that you are young and in touch with social media. To be in the forefront of what's new or trending is definitely an asset. That's something you bring to the company that you should not be doing for free or on your off hours. Don't downplay those skills because they are valuable.

In terms of advice for authors, AI came to mind since everyone is worried about it at the moment. I just finished the contract for my next book and my agent is great at being very diligent that none of the work will be fed into AI. Since I am not familiar with either AI or contracts, it's helpful that my agent is.

On Creative Form and Intent

GWJEP: As an illustrator, do you think that using your art as an avenue has allowed you to be more expressive and handle certain topics in an easily digestible way for your audience?

Kate Gavino: For graphic novels in general, I think there always has to be a reason why it is a graphic novel versus a straight up normal novel. For me, it's always because I like the fact that you can be visually rich. You can tell one story with the text, and tell another story with the images. In terms of illustrations, there's always another layer of story that can be told within the illustrations. Graphic novels should be read as slowly as possible because you're basically reading multiple stories at once.

On Upcoming Work

As we wrapped up our conversation, Gavino used the last moments of our Zoom call to discuss her upcoming book, *Take Care*.

GWJEP: Are there any upcoming projects that you have been working on?

Kate Gavino: My next book *Take Care* is coming out in 2027 through Tin House. In the same vein of my current books, it also follows a young, restless professional in New York City. Each book of mine gives me a chance to reflect on certain periods of my life. Since I am now based in Paris, this is me really missing New York, and the certain time period I lived in New York. It is part ghost story, part love story, about a young girl who meets her mom's ghost on the G train one day. It's a dreamy, reflective book set in New York with a workplace romance and mother-daughter bond thrown in. It's been fun to illustrate the city as a means of dealing with missing the city.

Closing Thoughts

Gavino's experiences in publishing as an editorial assistant and an author provide insight into an industry that is relatively mysterious to the general public. Our discussion helped to accentuate racial pigeonholing, money struggles, and more, as a companion tool to the wryly comedic graphic novel. In an ever-growing industry, Gavino's simplistic illustrations remind us of how important it is to stay vigilant and authentic in moments of adversity.

Author Bio: Kate Gavino is the author and illustrator of *Last Night's Reading, Sanpaku, and A Career in Books*. Her work has appeared in the New Yorker online, the Believer, the Washington Post, and O Magazine. Her next book, *Take Care*, is forthcoming from Tin House in 2027.

Integrity in Ink

A Conversation with Clifford Thompson, Author of ***Big Man and the Little Men***

Interview conducted by Alexus Wall, Content Committee Lead, GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

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Introduction

When a story walks the line between art and ethics, the medium can speak as loudly as the message. Clifford Thompson's *Big Man and the Little Men* does just that. Unfolding as both a political thriller and a moral inquiry transforms this graphic novel into a lens. The work follows April Wells, a Black journalist torn between truth and consequence, asking what integrity costs when the truth itself could alter an election. Thompson doesn't hand readers answers but invites them to wrestle with their own moral thresholds.

When we spoke over Zoom, Thompson was candid, warm, and reflective. He shared how his early love for comics, his passion for film, and his experience as a Black artist converged to shape this work. Our conversation wandered from his early love of comics and film, to the clarity of an outsider's perspective, to the dangers of misinformation, to the moral crossroads that define both

journalism and human experience.

What follows is an edited excerpt from our conversation, condensed for clarity and length.

> "If readers take away anything, I hope it's that things are often not as simple as we want to think they are."
>
> —CLIFFORD THOMPSON

On Creative Form and Intent

As we began, Thompson reflected on where his storytelling instincts first took root long before *Big Man and the Little Men* ever came to life.

GWJEP: What compelled you to tell this story through the medium of a graphic novel rather than traditional prose?

Clifford Thompson: The first art form that was my love as a creative person was comics. I loved *Peanuts* and *Charlie Brown* and *Snoopy* and the whole thing, and I loved Marvel comics. I spent my childhood and most of my teens drawing comics; that was my ambition in life. Eventually, I reached a point where my drawing had improved, but I felt like the improvement had kind of tapered off, and I became more interested in prose writing and, much later, painting.

In 2019 I told a friend over drinks that part of me wanted to make a film—but I was too old to learn how. My friend said, "You're a writer and you do visual art," and something about that stuck. That moment was like something out of an old movie—where a character says something and another goes, "Wait a minute, say that again." I thought, "I know what I'll do. I'll make a film, but it'll be in the form of a graphic novel." That's how *Big Man and the Little Men* came to life.

On Ethics and Moral Dilemmas

Our conversation soon turned to the tension at the heart of the novel: how personal conviction and public consequence can collide in unexpected ways.

GWJEP: April, your protagonist, faces a difficult moral choice between truth-

telling and political consequence. What conversations about journalistic or personal ethics influenced your approach to that conflict?

Clifford Thompson: We are just more separated as a nation than at any point in my lifetime, and that's a direct result of the way news is presented. When I was a boy, the most famous and trusted news person was Walter Cronkite. He simply presented the facts. People disagreed in their opinions about those facts, sure, but they were reacting to the same facts. Now, we're siloed. A character like Lee Newsom can emerge because people have been given misinformation. I wanted April's story to show that tension; how one's personal ethics meet a fractured public truth.

GWJEP: My own takeaway was how April's compromise felt painfully real. It reminded me how creative ethics and moral ethics can collide.

Clifford Thompson: That's exactly it. April isn't supposed to be perfect. I wanted her to represent the complexity of doing what feels right even when the result doesn't look right.

On Character and Identity

GWJEP: You chose to make April a Black woman navigating these moral challenges. How did that choice shape her story?

Clifford Thompson: Because I'm Black and I write fiction, my characters are often Black. But it's more than that. Black women, in particular, have historically occupied one of the most marginalized positions in this country. That outsider status gives them a view others might not have: a detachment, a clarity about how unfairness operates. April has a touch of imposter syndrome. She's smart, sometimes sad for reasons she can't quite name, and she's learning that things are even more complicated than she imagined. I wanted readers to see her as human first but to understand that her perspective comes from the margins and that matters.

GWJEP: You mentioned the Republican candidate, Newsom. Was that name choice intentional? Is there any relation to California's Governor Gavin Newsom?

Clifford Thompson: Somebody else mentioned that! How I came up with the name was: Lee is inspired by Robert E. Lee, and Newsom is meant to suggest "new-some", as in a "new version" of something old. So, while the name sounds contemporary, it's really a commentary on how some old ideas just keep showing up with new faces.

On Media and Cultural Relevance

Thompson's reflections on character naturally led to a wider conversation about the world his story lives in: a world where truth and perception are constantly at odds.

GWJEP: The novel feels incredibly timely, especially in how it examines media and truth. How do you see it engaging with today's media environment?

Clifford Thompson: As I mentioned, how the news is presented has separated us more as a nation than ever before. When I was a kid, we all reacted to the same stimuli. Now, not so much. Social media and cable news have become a kind of one-two punch. They feed us what we already believe. The algorithms want to please us, not challenge us, so they show us what we want to see. That comfort dulls our ability to think critically. *Big Man and the Little Men* is a reflection of that culture.

People want things to be simple. They want to understand things in a way that absolves them of responsibility. But things are often not simple. That's one of the main takeaways I want people to have: think more.

GWJEP: In your view, has the ease of information access made people better informed, or just more distracted?

Clifford Thompson: Both. It's wonderful that we can find anything at our fingertips, but the downside is that misinformation spreads just as fast. People don't always recognize it. When I was young, you went to the library or opened an encyclopedia — now people scroll and stop where they agree. It's easier than ever to get information and harder than ever to understand it.

On What Readers Take Away

GWJEP: What do you hope readers carry with them after finishing the book?

Clifford Thompson: I hope people understand that as much as we want things to be simple, they rarely are. It's easy to scapegoat, to find someone to blame, but things are almost always more complex. If readers take away anything, I hope it's to think more, to be more skeptical. It's easy to blame other people. But as April finds out, things are often not what they seem.

> "Black women have historically occupied one of the most marginalized positions in this country … that outsider status gives them a clear view others might not have."
>
> —CLIFFORD THOMPSON

GWJEP: The last panel left me gasping … it's powerful. What did you hope would linger for them after that ending?

Clifford Thompson: I wanted readers to realize that moral choices aren't clean. April's decision isn't heroic or villainous; it's human. The story shows that even with good intentions, outcomes can still wound. That last panel was meant to stay with readers and make them question what they'd have done in her place.

On Teaching and Reflection

GWJEP: If you were to teach *Big Man and the Little Men* in a course on publishing ethics, what discussion question would you open with?

Clifford Thompson: I'd ask if April did the right thing in the end. Where do journalistic ethics end and personal responsibility begin?

On Upcoming Work

GWJEP: You recently released *Jazz June: A Self-Portrait in Essays* and have a solo gallery show coming up in 2026. How do these projects connect to *Big Man and the Little Men*?

Clifford Thompson: *Jazz June: A Self-Portrait in Essays* brings together work I've written over the years about family, race, art, and friendship. Those themes overlap with *Big Man* in many ways. Both ask what it means to live ethically and creatively in a complicated world. And yes, I have another solo show at Blue Mountain Gallery in March 2026. I'm always trying to explore the intersections between writing and visual art—they feed each other.

Closing Thoughts

As our conversation wound down, Thompson returned to the idea that's been threaded through all his work: the power of art to make us pause, question, and look closer.

Thompson is currently preparing for his 2026 solo show and continues expanding his creative practice through essays and visual storytelling. Thompson reminds us that ethical questions in publishing are rarely black and white. *Big Man and the Little Men* challenges readers to confront the gray areas, where truth, identity, and responsibility collide. A reminder of what art can do when it refuses to simplify human truth. His next chapter, like April's, seems poised to keep asking: what is our responsibility to the stories we tell, and to those who trust us to tell them?

As we said our goodbyes, Thompson's calm thoughtfulness lingered— the kind that stays with you long after a story ends.

Author Bio

Clifford Thompson's books include What It Is: Race, Family, and One Thinking Black Man's Blues (2019) and Jazz June: A Self-Portrait in Essays (2025). He is the recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award for nonfiction and a Pushcart Prize, and his essays and reviews have appeared in Best American Essays, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, Commonweal, and the Threepenny Review, among other places. His novel Let Us Go Then, You and I will be published next fall by Running Wild Press.

Upcoming Work

Jazz June: A Self-Portrait in Essays (University of Georgia Press): October 2025. Available from the University of Georgia Press, Amazon and local bookstores

Upcoming Solo Exhibition: March 24 to April 18, 2026, at Blue Mountain Gallery, at 547 West 27th St., Suite 200, New York, NY.

Case Study

E.K. v. Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA)

Alyssa Gluf

Since 2021, there has been a sharp rise in book censorship across the United States, with 2,452 unique titles challenged in 2024.[1] PEN America identified the top subjects of these challenged books as sexual violence, LGBTQ+ and BIPOC narratives, and race and racism,[2] Following the introduction of three executive orders restricting discussions of gender identity and racial discrimination in federal schools,[3] the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a suit on behalf of Department of Defense (DoD) personnel (military and civilian) whose children attend DoDEA schools to keep books on these subjects available to students. Book bans can affect decision-making in the publishing industry, making them wary of accepting books on certain topics or books by marginalized authors. Educational publishers are particularly vulnerable in these cases, as they rely on their books being in schools and libraries.

Key Players

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA): A federal school system that provides and directs K-12 education for children of active duty military members and DoD civilian families. These schools are not limited to the United States, but also operate in eleven foreign countries as well as Guam and Puerto Rico.

1. American Library Association, "Censorship by the Numbers," n.d.
2. PEN America, "Banned in the USA: Narrating the Crisis - PEN America," September 20, 2024.
3. Executive Orders No. 14168, 14185, 14190.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): A nonprofit organization dedicated to upholding civil rights in the United States since 1920. The ACLU provides legal assistance in civil rights cases and advocates for its core values, including LGBTQ+ rights, reproductive rights, and racial justice, among others.

Unnamed minors and their parents: Twelve students (anonymous as minors) attending DoDEA schools and their parents. They have raised concerns about censorship in their schools. "E.K.," who is in the name of the case, is one of these students.

Case background

This case comes at a time when moral panic is increasingly influencing legislation. Discussions of gender, sexuality and racial injustice have been prominent in our recent social and political discourse. Disagreements on whether children should be educated on these subjects are a large part of the conversation.

In January 2025, President Trump signed three executive orders banning materials exploring gender identity and racial discrimination in federally funded K-12 schools. These materials include, but are not limited to, mentions of slavery, the civil rights movement, the treatment of Native Americans, and the existence of transgender and gender non-conforming people.[4]

As a result, schools within the DoDEA system have been instructed to "quarantine" 233 books, change curricula, and cancel events to prevent students from engaging with subjects deemed inappropriate.[5] Schools that continue to teach these topics risk losing government funding. The books were initially removed from school and library shelves without the list being available for parents, but the judge in this case ordered the books to be returned (at the request of the ACLU) while the trial is ongoing.

Legal Analysis

On behalf of a group of military families and their children from five DoDEA schools, the ACLU is suing the DoDEA under the assertion that this activity violates the First Amendment right to receive information, prevents students from pursuing their own research, and causes irreparable harm to students.

4. Smith and Smith, "Books Mentioning Slavery, Civil Rights Removed from Shelves at Fort Campbell Schools - ClarksvilleNow.Com."
5. "Military Families Seek Preliminary Injunction Against Censorship in Department of Defense Schools | American Civil Liberties Union," May 7, 2025.

They argue this censorship is not based on evidence of pedagogical harm but rather on discrimination, the suppression of different viewpoints, and the president's personal dislike of the subject matter.

The DoDEA is arguing for the dismissal of the case on several grounds. They claim that issues like this must be settled with public authorities like school boards rather than federal judges. They also argue that the chain of command flows from the elected school board to the Secretary of Defense, who answers to the president. Therefore, the president is representative of the school board and can establish policies as he sees fit.

Furthermore, the DoDEA claims that the ACLU cannot prove that the quarantines are the result of bias rather than "pedagogical concern." In terms of returning the books to shelves, they allege that the books were taken away in the previous school year—long enough that their removal could not possibly be causing "irreparable harm" to students. Finally, they assert that "gender ideology" and "discriminatory or divisive content" (i.e., content about racial privilege and oppression) are reasonable grounds to question a book's value and factual accuracy.[6]

The case is ongoing and, at the time of writing, the ACLU is fighting the DoDEA's motions to have the complaint dismissed. The outcome of this case could set the precedent for all federally funded schools and the rights of military families attending DoDEA schools.

Ethical Analysis

This case is one of many conversations currently happening around book censorship in the United States. Various groups dedicate themselves to removing content on racial discrimination, unflattering American history, and gender exploration from schools and libraries. Considering this new wave of censorship, publishers and authors must reckon with the potential effects.

While well-established authors like Angie Thomas (*The Hate U Give*) or John Green (*Looking for Alaska*) may see defiant boosts in sales after their books are banned, lesser-known authors, especially queer and BIPOC authors, aren't as fortunate. Book banning can have a domino effect: libraries and schools may avoid certain titles and authors out of fear of controversy or losing funding, publishers begin to see these titles as risky in terms of profit, and authors feel

6. "Defendants' Memorandum of Law in Support of Their Motion to Dismiss | E.K. V. Department of Defense Education Activity E.D. Va. | Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse."

discouraged from writing on these subjects. Some authors, especially children's and educational authors, rely heavily on school and library events and will lose a major source of income if their books are banned.

The industry must weigh potential risks against pressing ethical questions. For publishers, this means asking ourselves what precedent we set by turning away marginalized voices. Are there ways we can support these authors without relying on schools or libraries? What do consumers expect of us in this regard? For educators, it is a question of their responsibility to nurture learning. Where is the line between books that are inappropriate and books that inform on difficult subjects? What do educators lose when they can no longer work with certain authors and books?

The answers to these questions have their own effects. As an example, boycotts against retailers like Target have exemplified some of the ways consumers have responded to DEI rollbacks. If publishers choose not to fight book bans, they risk losing integrity with the public and potentially alienating authors. However, if the publisher goes the other way and doubles down on fighting bans, could the opposition be equally damaging?

We may not have the answers to these questions, but publishers will need to consider the potential backlash and reaffirm their willingness to stand with their stated values.

Author's Position

This case is just one of many in the war over book banning. Whether or not the motives behind book bans and challenges are valid, the message is clear: more bans are happening, and works about marginalized people are being specifically targeted. A PEN America study recorded 10,046 instances of bans in public schools across the U.S. between 2023 and 2024, with 1,091 of those books being banned in two or more school districts. Of the 1,091 books, 44% prominently featured BIPOC characters and people, and 39% prominently featured LGBTQ+ characters and people.[7]

The ACLU's argument in this case sums it up perfectly: by banning books, we deprive students of the ability to form educated opinions and think critically. Aside from being highly damaging for children and ethically unacceptable, book banning is inherently antithetical to the success of authors and the publishing industry. Acquiescing to bans emboldens the groups that lobby for them and furthers their momentum to ban more titles. Publishers do not have to stand

7. PEN America, "Banned in the USA: Beyond the Shelves - PEN America," November 1, 2024, https://pen.org/report/beyond-the-shelves/.

by and let it happen.

While larger publishers such as the "Big Five" have taken steps to affirm their support for diversity and helped with several state-level lawsuits against censorship, smaller publishers do not have the resources to take similar risks.

As professionals in the industry and as human beings, we have an ethical obligation to protect knowledge and allow all voices to be heard. More court cases like this will come, but as we wait for rulings, there are some steps we can consider now:

- Training editorial teams to avoid preemptive censoring out of fear of controversy.
- Planning and providing support for children's and young adult authors if their books get banned.
- Strategize with marketing that leans into reading banned books as an act of defiance in the fight for free speech.
- Seek support from organizations dedicated to fighting book bans, like the National Coalition Against Censorship, the American Library Association, the ACLU, and PEN America.

Regardless of the eventual ruling in E.K. v. Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), the fight will continue for as long as we are willing to hold the line.

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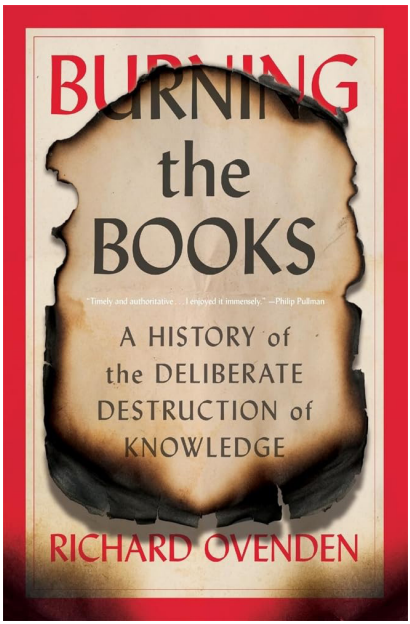
Book Reviews

Book Review

A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge by Richard Ovenden

Reviewed by Alyssa Gluf



Throughout history, humans have demonstrated a consistent pattern of destroying knowledge. Libraries and books have been razed by enemy armies, clay tablets reused to repair buildings, facts quietly edited out of Wikipedia articles.

This recurring theme in civilization raises a critical question: why is the destruction of knowledge so persistent across time?

Burning the Books: A History of the Deliberate Destruction of Knowledge takes readers through history's most significant instances of archive destruction to find what society loses when there are insufficient records of the past. In examining the myriad motives for destroying knowledge, Richard Ovenden, director of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, makes a compelling case for the need to preserve libraries and archives in the digital age.

Combining his study of history with his firsthand experience as a librarian, Ovenden explores the various motivations behind the destruction of archives throughout history, ranging from moral panic to mundane carelessness. The thread connecting these events leads back to Ovenden's central thesis: without subjective records of the past to learn from, our future is in peril.

As a librarian, Ovenden approaches writing in a way that is thorough and scholarly. The beginning of the book rattles off quite a few names in such a short amount of space that it can be overwhelming, and some of the events studied in the first few chapters are similar enough that they blur together a little. Still, the knowledge imparted is valuable and helps build momentum for the rest of the book in contrasting instances of malice with those of neglect.

Burning the Books really begins to shine when it gets into more unique incidents of the modern era, where Ovenden examines the ethics around the ownership of knowledge. What was lost to the world when Lord Byron's friends decided to "protect his legacy" by burning his memoirs after his death? What is in Sylvia Plath's journals that Ted Hughes did not want the world to know? Who controls the narrative?

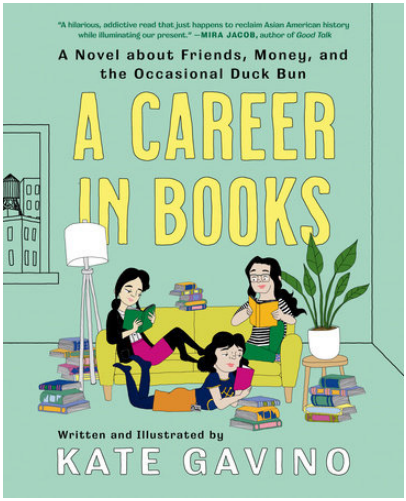
This brings us to the greatest threat to knowledge in our time: the preservation of data. In a world where politicians are on social media and data is owned by a small handful of large companies, it is becoming increasingly difficult to track online history and hold those in charge accountable. Ovenden effectively conveys the urgency of this threat but also offers ways that the average person can amplify the voices of those fighting for more funding toward digital preservation.

Burning the Books is ultimately a highly persuasive case for robust archiving, and it opens up ethical questions we will have to consider when weighing the importance of preserving knowledge against the right to destroy our own creations. The book itself serves as a collection of knowledge we have gained from the past, so that we may learn from it and guard ourselves against a potentially bleak future.

Book Review

A Career in Books: A Novel about Friends, Money, and the Occasional Duck Bun
by Kate Gavino

Reviewed by Savannah Aleksic



A Career in Books by Kate Gavino is a graphic novel that explores the lives and aspirations of three twenty-something Asian-American roommates living in one of the largest and most expensive cities in the world—New York City. The three girls each land entry-level jobs in publishing, one at a university press, another with a traditional publisher, and the third at a trust-fund kid's "indie" publisher. Throughout the novel, Nina, Shirin, and Silvia learn firsthand that a career in publishing isn't as glamorous as they first thought, marked by disappointing paychecks, racial microaggressions, and a sense of unfulfillment.

Gavino describes, "*A Career in Books* is a graphic novel for everyone who's wanted to 'work with books' and had NO idea what it entailed." Our three heroines learn this not just from their new 9-5s, but also from their nonagenarian neighbor, Veronica Vo, who turns out to be a Nobel Prize-

winning "one-hit-wonder" novelist with a long catalog of books that were put out of print because people of the time weren't interested in reading about everyday Asian-American women doing normal everyday things. Throughout the novel, the girls make it their mission to get these books reprinted for a modern audience who will appreciate their realistic representation of the woes of women who spend their day-to-day working in an office job, a *Vorenaissance*, if you will.

Although the book had its funny moments, it was important to read not only for its strong messages on the realities of entering into the publishing world and the racial and sexist microaggressions that come with the territory of working in such a field, but also for the camaraderie and sisterhood that flowed through the pages. It was a delight to read about the friendship between these three girls as they navigate the complexities of an industry where "more than 70% of the individuals were white," and despite this, "only 7% of these women are Asian, 6% are Latinx, and 5% are Black." *A Career in Books* touches on this in an easily digestible way. An example of this is when Shirin's boss assumes she knows Cantonese and uses her as a figurehead for their Eastern studies imprint.

This novel not only addresses catastrophic mass layoffs in the industry but also showcases the importance of community in a system not designed for everyone to thrive. This novel complements other recent works, such as *Yellowface* by R.F. Kuang, which was reviewed in a past issue of the *GWJEP*. Both use humor, and comical plotlines, to emphasize what lies behind the curtain of the publishing industry, both the good and the bad, and the duck bun of it all. In *A Career in Books*, Gavino is able to utilize a graphic novel format to amplify how community and allyship can disrupt exclusionary systems, an important discussion to be had on the ethical issues that have historically been prevalent in the publishing industry, and how they are still experienced to this day.

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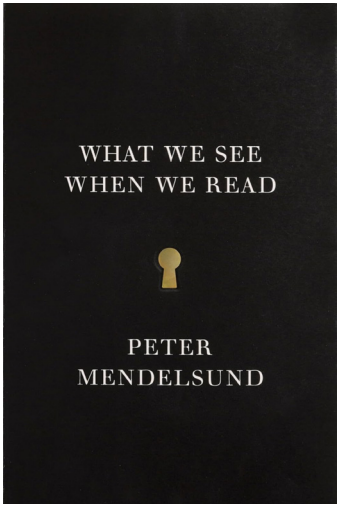
Book Review

What We See When We Read
by Peter Mendelsund

Reviewed by Brianna Lantz



What We See When We Read shows readers what really goes on inside our heads when we read and how authors can influence those visuals. It prompts readers to consider how their prior knowledge and the author's choices can influence what they visualize while reading. Although this book doesn't go into the science and specifics behind what is actually happening inside of our minds, it does explore where we may get the images we produce and how we use other information to fill in any gaps.

Outside of being an author, Peter Mendelsund is a graphic designer known for his magazine and book covers. Due to his creative line of work, it would make sense that he has an interest and talent for understanding what readers visualize while reading. His ability to take written descriptions and create something from them makes him a great candidate to explore this topic.

Mendelsund uses different imagery examples throughout the novel in order to explain his thoughts. The most used image is of Anna Karenina, the main character from Leo Tolstoy's 1878 novel. When readers are asked to

describe Anna Karenina, we may rely on what Tolstoy has written and then fill in the gaps based on other information we already know. Mendelsund writes that we as readers have to go through this process because no author is going to go into great detail all at once. He also explains how certain descriptions are important not only to what readers see but also to how we imagine a character may feel and act. He uses the example of Anna's husband's ears and writes that they grow in tandem with Anna's disgust for him. Therefore, this visual aspect tells readers more about how Anna feels about her husband and less about his actual looks, which is often more important.

Regarding ethics in publishing, *What We See When We Read* could be incredibly important during a time of AI visualizers. Now more than ever, it seems like readers can be found relying on generative AI to create imagery of what a fictional character, world, or item may look like. Consumers seem to be losing their creativity and no longer using their imagination. This novel could help bring the focus back to originality and artistry and let authors and artists shine within their fields.

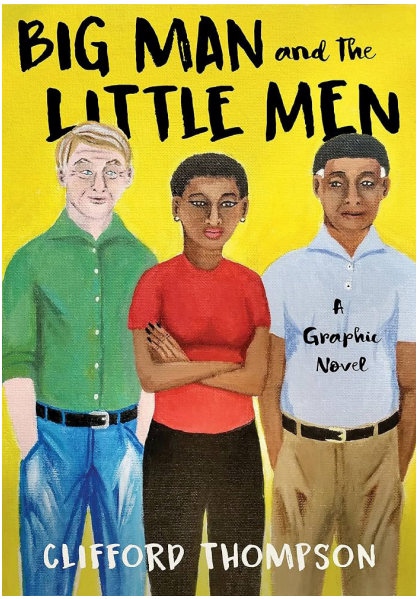
Several questions arise while reading as readers begin to consider their own experiences with visualization and imagery. How does modern technology, such as movies and TV shows, affect our visualizing experience? Does everyone visualize in color, or do some people visualize in black and white? What about the people who don't have the ability to actually see what they're reading inside of their head? These are all things that could be answered with more in-depth and scientific research but are ultimately not what the novel focuses on.

What We See When We Read offers a look into the cognitive and imaginative processes that occur when we engage with a text. Mendelsund explores how readers construct mental images based on limited textual clues, personal experiences, and cultural contexts, without delving into the neuroscience of reading. His insights challenge readers to consider what is happening in their minds and how outside influences may be affecting what they're visualizing in an age when AI-generated content is on the rise.

Book Review

Big Man and the Little Men *by Clifford Thompson*

Reviewed by Alexus Wall



When exposure risks greater harm, who determines the moral hierarchy of truth? Clifford Thompson's *Big Man and the Little Men* is a thought-provoking hybrid, part political thriller, part ethical inquiry, that uses the graphic novel form to test the limits of integrity. At the center of the story is April Wells, a Black memoirist and journalist whose integrity is tested when she is assigned to cover a charismatic Democratic presidential candidate whose rhetoric of hope begins to fracture when allegations of sexual misconduct surface. April faces an impossible choice: to publish the story and risk handing victory to the far-right opponent, or to suppress it and compromise her own ethics. This tension between personal conscience and collective consequence drives the book's emotional core. Thompson doesn't offer moral clarity; instead, he situates readers in April's uncertainty, her private negotiations with guilt, fear, and self-preservation. He forces us to question whether the ends can ever justify the means.

Thompson, an essayist and visual artist known for exploring race and

morality in American life, turns to sequential art to expand his moral vocabulary. What makes *Big Man and the Little Men* so distinctive is Thompson's choice of form. By choosing a graphic novel format, he transforms the reading into an immersive experience instead of relying on prose to deliver this ethically charged story. In a sense, Thompson's story is also a provocation to the industry's old hierarchy that treats text-heavy nonfiction as the primary vessel for "serious" ideas. The graphic form would appeal to readers who might never pick up a media ethics monograph. The illustrated panels slow down the perception so we don't just follow events, we witness them. The reader becomes an observer and accomplice, implicated in every decision April makes. Every pause, every shift in angle, and every trace of silence holds meaning. The form itself becomes a kind of ethical mirror, asking readers to consider what we see, what we overlook, and how easily narrative can be shaped by framing.

The story's symmetry also deserves praise. Thompson builds a subtle balance between beginning and end, where mirrored panels and recurring motifs reinforce the cyclical nature of truth and consequence. The final panel, in particular, delivers a striking sense of closure. One that may leave readers gasping at the quiet but powerful realization it conveys. It's an ending that lingers, forcing reflection long after the book is closed.

From an ethical-publishing perspective, *Big Man and the Little Men* is an act of formal resistance. It challenges the notion that weighty topics must be confined to prose essays or policy writing, demonstrating that visual narrative can hold moral gravitas. The choice of medium also democratizes access to philosophical reflection, reaching audiences who might not engage with academic treatments of media ethics or political corruption.

That said, I occasionally found myself wanting more emotional depth in the visual storytelling. Some sequences rely heavily on dialogue where silence or visual tension could have spoken louder. Those moments left me wishing the art had been allowed to carry more of the moral weight. Additionally, the book's dialogue occasionally leans too heavily on exposition, which can blunt emotional immediacy. Some conversations spell out ethical ideas that the visuals already communicate effectively. Ultimately, Thompson reminds us that in both politics and publishing, integrity is not a possession but a practice tested every time we choose what story to tell and how to tell it. *Big Man and the Little Men* is not just a story about media and politics, but a meditation on the cost of integrity in an era when truth itself is negotiable.

Submission Guidelines

Call for Papers

Submit your article using the *GWJEP* Scholastica submission site.

The George Washington University Master of Professional Studies in Publishing program solicits papers for the *George Washington Journal of Ethics in Publishing (GWJEP)*. This online journal is managed by students in the GW Publishing program and overseen by Editor-in-Chief Michelle Wilson and an editorial board of publishing professionals.

The *GWJEP* is published in conjunction with the GW Ethics in Publishing Conference. Conference presentations as well as papers based on previously-presented material are also encouraged. The journal publishes on the Manifold Scholarship platform developed by the University of Minnesota Press, the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, and Cast Iron Coding through a grant from the Mellon Foundation. The peer review platform has been provided by Scholastica.

We welcome scholarly research articles, case studies, book reviews, and conference presentations from scholars, students, and publishing professionals on topics including but not limited to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), accessibility, sustainability, open access, peer review, publishing metrics, and other aspects and issues of ethics in publishing. Innovative forms of scholarship, such as audiovisual media, are also encouraged. The journal invites submissions from publishing professionals in all areas of the publishing industry, including academics, librarians, authors, illustrators, editors, agents, rights managers, production managers, paper producers, ink suppliers, and more. Articles relating to any publishing sector are welcome, including academic and trade publishing. Student submissions are also highly encouraged; papers from underrepresented voices are especially encouraged.

Peer review will use a double-blind process, which ensures anonymity between author and reviewer. The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* accepts five main categories of articles:

- Scholarly articles and case studies presenting research about ethical issues in publishing
- Applied Ethics/"Making the World Better" articles and projects that explore contributions to local, regional, or global publishing networks, as well as initiatives in literacy and related fields.
- Editorials and commentaries (Invited by editorial board, but contact if you have an idea)
- Reviews of books, websites, digital projects, and other web resources with a focus or considerable aspect of ethics in publishing.
- Conference presentations

See also the journal's Instructions for Authors and Peer Review Guidelines.

Instructions for Authors

The Basics

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* is an open-access, online journal managed by students in the George Washington University's Master of Professional Studies (MPS) in Publishing program. Manuscripts can be submitted via our Scholastica peer review platform. If you need assistance, please email gwupress@gmail.com.

We welcome scholarly research articles, case studies, book reviews, and conference presentations from scholars, students, and publishing professionals on topics including but not limited to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), accessibility, sustainability, open access, peer review, publishing metrics, and other aspects and issues of ethics in publishing. Innovative forms of scholarship, such as audiovisual media, are also encouraged.

The journal invites submissions from publishing professionals in all areas of the publishing industry, including academics, librarians, authors, illustrators, editors, agents, rights managers, production managers, paper producers, ink suppliers, and more. Articles relating to any publishing sector are welcome, including academic and trade publishing. Student submissions are also highly encouraged.

Each submission should include the following items:

- The email address of the primary author
- The names and email addresses of all contributing authors
- A short biography of each author (100 words maximum)
- URL links to the author's (or authors') personal, project, or university/company websites
- An article abstract (300 words maximum)
- The article or presentation (as a Word.doc attachment)

We generally accept 6,000- to 7,000-word articles but will consider shorter articles. All articles must have a title, an abstract, an introduction, a body, a conclusion, and a reference list; scholarly research articles and case studies have additional requirements (see below). Chicago Author-Date style is required for all in-text citations and reference entries. Chicago Notes-Bibliography Style will not be accepted.

We know tone and voice differ based on the subject and style of submission, so our only requirement is that tone and voice are internally consistent within an article. The author is free to use the tone and voice they find most appropriate. Authors are encouraged to use the *Inclusive Language Guide* from the APA and the *Conscious Style Guide* founded by Karen Yin.

Article Types

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* accepts five main article types:

- Scholarly research articles and case studies that explore ethical issues in publishing
- Articles about real-world, applied ethics projects in the publishing ecosystem
- Reviews of books and other media with a focus on publishing ethics
- Presentation write-ups from the GW Ethics in Publishing Conference
- Editorials and commentaries on ethical issues in publishing (invitation only)
- Scholarly Research Articles and Case Studies

Scholarly research articles and case studies present original findings resulting from qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research. They should generally be between 3,000 and 6,000 words long, but we will consider exceptions. Articles should include the following sections (may vary per article):

- Title Page
- Abstract (300 words maximum)
- Introduction
- Literature Review (when applicable)
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion

- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- References
- Author Bio(s)

The introduction must include a clear thesis statement. The recommendations section should include three to five items (arranged in a bulleted list) describing how publishing professionals can apply the article's findings to real-life publishing practice. The conclusion must summarize the article and emphasize why readers should be concerned or interested in the article's topic. The references section must be in Chicago Author-Date Style format. The author bio(s) should include the name of the author(s), their institutional/professional affiliation(s), and a brief description of their expertise in the relevant field.

All scholarly research articles and case studies undergo double-anonymous peer review.

Applied Ethics Projects

Applied ethics projects explore ways that publishing and publishing professionals (students included) positively contribute to their local, regional, or global communities. In other words, applied ethics projects strive to "make the world better." Applied ethics projects may vary considerably in form and scope, and they mainly involve one or more of the following elements:

Advocacy: Contributing to causes that promote knowledge and understanding (such as DEI awareness and education, accessibility implementation, censorship resistance, literacy promotion, etc.).

Engagement: Enhancing public awareness of and participation in issues concerning the public good (such as online piracy, AI usage, Open Access scholarship, etc.).

Volunteerism: Volunteering at an individual or organizational level to make the publishing ecosystem a better, more ethical space.

Organization: Organizing and engaging communities using publishing to develop community goals, values, and relationships (for example, developing a community newsletter).

Articles reviewing applied ethics projects should generally be between 3,000 and 6,000 words long, but exceptions will be considered. They should generally include the following sections (although some sections may vary per article):

- Title Page
- Abstract (300 words maximum)
- Introduction
- Project Scope and Goals
- Actions and Methods
- Discussion and Implications
- Results and Impact
- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Author Bio(s)

The introduction must include a clear thesis statement. The project's scope and goals must be clearly defined and measurable. The recommendations section should include three to five items (arranged in a bulleted list) describing how publishing professionals can apply the article's findings to real-life publishing practice. The conclusion must summarize the article and emphasize why readers should be concerned or interested in the article's topic. The references section must be in Chicago Author-Date Style format. The author bio(s) should include the name of the author(s), their institutional/professional affiliation(s), and a brief description of their expertise in the relevant field.

Applied ethics projects may be improved through active peer review; however, due to their variable nature, some projects may not warrant peer review. The editorial board will make a case-by-case determination of what is needed.

Reviews

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* welcomes book and media (such as websites, digital projects, digital resources, and so on) reviews focusing on publishing ethics or involving a considerable element of publishing ethics.

Reviews should generally be between 500 and 1,500 words, although exceptions will be considered, especially for reviews of multiple titles or resources. They should include the following sections:

Citation: Include a full reference entry for the reviewed item in Chicago Author-Date Style. When reviewing an online resource, include an access date in addition to the date of publication.

Authority: Briefly summarize the relevant background or expertise of the author(s), creator(s), or editor(s) of the reviewed item.

Audience: Specify the target audience of the reviewed item. In other words, specify the people or groups who would make use of the reviewed item.

Content: Detail the content and goals of the reviewed item, including whether the creator(s) effectively communicated the content and accomplished their goals.

Quality: Assess the quality of the content, including whether the content is grounded in facts and logic and is backed by science and current research.

Usefulness: Comment on whether the reviewed item advances the field to which it belongs, publishing ethics, or publishing in general.

Impact: Assess the importance of the reviewed item for its intended audience and the publishing industry in general.

Your Bio: Include a brief biography at the end of the review, including your name, your institutional/professional affiliation, and a brief description of your expertise in the field.

The Editorial Board may solicit authors and items for review, but we welcome review proposals. Please let us know if you have a book, article, or website that you would like to review. You must let us know if you have any conflicts of interest or connection to the work's authors, editors, or publishers that you intend to review.

GW Ethics in Publishing Conference Presentations

The annual GW Ethics in Publishing Conference complements the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*. Presenters are invited to submit articles based on their conference presentations (following the above guidelines for scholarly research articles, case studies, or applied ethics projects–whichever is more applicable). Conference videos are available for the 2020 and 2021 conferences.

Invited Editorials and Commentaries

The Editorial Board will invite editorials and commentaries from publishing, library, and scholarly communication professionals, researchers, scholars, and others to comment on their work in publishing, their efforts to make publishing more ethical, and their efforts in advancing the field.

If you have an idea or suggestion or would like to be considered for an editorial or commentary, please contact Editor-in-Chief Lois Jones at lijones@email.gwu.edu.

Style Requirements

Title Page

Title
- Centered
- Bolded
- Located ⅓ down the page

Subtitle
- Centered
- Bolded
- Located on the line after the title

Author(s) name(s) and affiliation(s)
- Centered
- Plain Text
- Located ⅔ down the page

Conflict(s) of interest disclosure
- Left-aligned
- Plain text
- Located at the bottom of the page

The title page is double spaced.

Abstract

Heading (the word "Abstract")
- Centered
- Bolded
- Located at the top of the page

Content (a one-paragraph summary of the article)
- Left-aligned
- No indent
- Located on the line after the heading

The abstract is double-spaced and should be no more than a paragraph long.

Section Headers

Use up to three heading levels (as formatted above) to divide the article into sections.

Body
- Double-spaced (except for block quotes)
- Left-aligned
- First line of each paragraph indented

In-text citations formatted in Chicago Author-Date Style
Pages numbered
Masked

Because the article will undergo double-anonymous peer review, the article must be masked, meaning that no information could identify the author(s) or their affiliation(s) may be included. Identifying information should only be included on the title page. Any identifying information crucial to the article's narrative can be restored to the article after it passes peer review and before publication.

References

Heading (the word "References")
- Centered
- Bolded
- Located at the top of the page

Reference entries
- Left-aligned
- Hanging indent
- Single-spaced with an extra line of space between reference entries

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* for its citations and references: https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org. The journal uses Chicago Author-Date Style, not Chicago Notes-Bibliography Style. Please ensure your citations and reference entries are accurate and that all hyperlinks are functional.

Figures

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* requires that all published articles meet basic digital accessibility standards for visual resources. Papers accepted for publication that include images, charts, videos, or other visual assets must include alt-text (or long descriptions) for each visual asset, as well as appropriate captions.

For information on the basic principles of describing visual resources for accessibility in arts and humanities publications, please consult Stephanie Rosen's *Describing Visual Resources Toolkit:*

https://describingvisualresources.org/guidelines/basic-principles/

AI Policies

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* follows GWU's guidelines on the use of generative AI for its submissions as a baseline, with more stringent guidelines on generative AI. While generative AI may be used to help an author find a starting point for their research, brainstorm, or create accurate citations and bibliographic entries, it may not be used, in whole or part, to write the submission. Nothing created with or by AI may be submitted for consideration for publishing.

In accordance with GWU's AI policies, work submitted for evaluation is represented as the author's own intellectual product. Authors may not submit content (e.g., ideas, text, code, images) for evaluation or publication that was generated, in whole or in part, by generative artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT and other large language models).

The use of tools such as spell and grammar check are permitted. A short list of approved AI to aid in spell and grammar check are Microsoft Word's Spell and Grammar Check, Grammarly, QuillBot, GrammarCheck, and Scribbr. Many of these sites have additional features, like a paraphrasing tool. Paraphrasing tools count as generative AI and may not be used.

Questions?

If you have any questions about the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*, contact Lois Jones at lijones@gwu.edu. If you have questions about the Ethics in Publishing Conference, please contact John W. Warren, Director and Associate Professor of the Master of Professional Studies program, at jww@gwu.edu.

Peer Review Guidelines

The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* welcomes articles, case studies, and conference presentations from students, professionals, and scholars on a range of topics, including: EDI (equity, diversity, inclusion), accessibility, peer review, open access, sustainability, publishing metrics, and any other aspects of ethics in publishing. Submissions are subject to peer review.

Peer review is a fundamental element of scholarly communication that provides valuable guidance to authors in the development and improvement of their submissions and protects journal integrity.

Peer reviews should focus on adhering to the following values: equity, openness, respect, and quality. Final decision for publication will be made by the Editor-in-Chief after considering peer review from multiple reviewers.

GWJEP uses double-masked peer review, so neither the author nor the reviewer know each other's identity unless indicated in advance. Manuscripts are confidential and only shared for the purposes of peer review.

Peer Review Guidelines:

Before you review: When you receive a request to review via Scholastica, you should first assess the time commitment, your applicable expertise, and if you have any conflicts of interest.

A conflict of interest can be financial, such as if you benefit from a product, service, or company that is mentioned in the submission. Other conflicts include personal or close professional relationships with the author(s), which could impact your review of the manuscript, either positively or negatively. If you are unsure if something constitutes a conflict, you should contact the editor or include this information in your review.

If you would like to volunteer to review for the journal, please contact us at gwupress@gmail.com.

Submission Ratings: When you submit your review via Scholastica, you

will be asked to rate the following questions on a 1–5 rating scale (i.e. Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree).

1. The article makes a significant contribution to scholarship.
2. This article adequately engages with the relevant scholarly literature.
3. The article is professionally written, easy to read, and generally free from grammar or spelling errors.
4. The research methodology for the study is appropriate and applied properly. Note: not all articles will have methodology.
5. The literature review was thorough given the objectives and content of the article.

You will then have a text box to provide narrative comments to the author. A separate box is included for any comments you want to provide to the editor but not the author. This could include information that might reveal your identity.

To guide your narrative response, please consider the questions below.

Review Questions

You are not expected to answer all questions, but they should guide your thinking.

- What are the strengths of the manuscript?
- Does the article contribute to the scholarly field? For example, is it original, is it valid, and does it contribute to the understanding of ethical issues in publishing?
- Are the author's arguments clear, logical, and concise?
- Is the article well-written and well-organized? Are there sections that could be improved?

Introduction

- Is the premise or purpose of the submission clear?
- If applicable, is relevant literature reviewed and synthesized across themes, methods, or findings, rather than by author?
- Are the authors' assumptions clarified and addressed?

Methodology

This section will only be relevant for research articles.

- Is the methodology appropriate and comprehensive?
- Do you know who studied, when the study took place, and how research was conducted?
- Has the study taken into account diversity and inclusivity as part of the design?
- Did the author address limitations of the study design, such as the participant sample used?
- Conclusion
- Is the conclusion logical and appropriate to what has come before in the body of the article?
- Is there sufficient evidence presented in the text for the conclusion?

Discussion

- If applicable, does the manuscript provide a clear summary of the findings of the study at the end?
- Does the author make convincing connections between findings in this study and the field?
- Are implications for this topic and future research or practice discussed?
- Do recommendations clearly stem from the results?

Decision Recommendation:

You will also be asked to provide a recommendation for publication:

- **Accept, no revisions needed:** Paper is well written and a significant contribution to the literature. No improvement needed.
- **Revise and resubmit, minor revisions requested:** Well-written, well-organized with some minor edits to arguments, research, or analysis. Additional including formatting, grammar, or style suggestions required.

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