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Articles

Promoting Diversity and Inclusion in Editorial Boards Using Open Calls:

A Case Study of the Experience of the Journal Microbiology Spectrum

Adrianna Borgia, MS and Anand Balasubramani, PhD

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Abstract

Traditionally, editorial boards are built by a journal's leadership, which reaches out to its network of colleagues and identifies individuals to nominate. However,

this can result in a number of biases, from regionalism to difficulty in fostering scientific diversity. In contrast, an Open Board means that any and all qualified applicants can apply to join. Whether or not the applicant knows someone on the leadership team has no bearing in the selection process; selection truly comes down to the applicant's merits. An Open Board is welcoming and promotes diversity and inclusion. It also encourages applications from individuals who are genuinely interested in contributing to the journal and its mission. In this case study, we discuss how the Open Board approach was used at the American Society for Microbiology to build a large and diverse board for our newest journal, *Microbiology Spectrum*. As a result of our open call, we built a large, multi-national board comprising over 300 microbiologists. In addition to geographic diversity, this approach has allowed us to factor in topical expertise, gender balance, and racial inclusivity when building an editorial board. Herein, we report both the benefits and challenges of building an editorial board using this approach.

Introduction

The foundation of any journal is its editorial leadership. Editors are the guardians of the journal's content and its editorial and peer review processes. They have the technical expertise and the experience to decide whether or not papers are sent out for peer review and, ultimately, which papers are accepted and published. Many organizations acknowledge that the diversity of editorial boards (scientific, geographic, and demographic) can create a more inclusive and equitable environment for peer review (Goyanes and Demeter 2020), but building diversity into editorial boards remains a challenge. Women continue to be underrepresented on editorial boards (Liu et al. 2023), and representation in other areas, such as geographic, racial, and ethnic diversity, can be further improved (Yip and Rashid 2021; Liu, Rahwan, and AlShebli 2023).

Expertise across the breadth of the journal's scope is just as important as diversity, and balancing these needs requires considerable thought and planning. Traditionally, a journal's leadership team (editor-in-chief, advisory board, etc.) builds its editorial board by reaching out to their network of colleagues to see who may be interested in joining the board. While this can effectively identify qualified and trustworthy candidates, the process is inherently exclusionary and elitist. Potential candidates need to be within the networks of the leadership team, which is limiting considering that many biomedical science journals and editors-in-chief are based in North America, Europe, and Australia (Smith et al. 2023), while scientists from Asia, Africa, and South

America are underrepresented on editorial boards (Liu, Rahwan, and AlShebli 2023). Biases here can range from regionalism (US-based editors nominating other US-based editors) to difficulty in fostering scientific diversity (i.e., a lack of expertise in certain areas on the board and an overabundance in others).

In contrast, an Open Board means that any applicant can apply to join through a self-nomination process. From there, the application is reviewed by a set of judges (staff and/or volunteer journal leadership) against standard criteria so that applicants are evaluated using the same metrics. This approach removes the value of whether an applicant knows someone on the leadership team; selection truly comes down to the applicant's merits. In contrast to the traditional process, an Open Board is more welcoming and promotes diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI). It also encourages individuals who are genuinely interested in contributing their time and expertise to the journal's mission. Open Board calls can be for a limited period (i.e., to fill a specific position on the board), or, in the case of large, broad-scope journals like *PLOS One* and *Frontiers*, they can be ongoing.

This case study describes the results of the Open Board call for the journal *Microbiology Spectrum* from April 2021 through November 2022. While it is not the first attempt at an Open Board for the American Society for Microbiology (ASM), it is the largest in terms of scale and effort.

Methods

Journal Relaunch

The American Society for Microbiology (ASM) is a member-driven organization with over 28,500 members worldwide. ASM has fifteen journals that collectively publish around 6,000 articles per year. These titles span the breadth of microbiology, from basic and clinical to applied, industrial, and environmental. In addition to primary research titles, ASM also has review-, data-, and education-centric journals. According to the 2022 Journal Citation Reports (Clarivate 2023), ASM journals account for 23% of all microbiology citations in the field and over 15% of all published articles in the microbiology category of the Journal Citation Index.

In April 2021, *Microbiology Spectrum*, a journal that historically published a small number of reviews and monographs, was relaunched as ASM's newest broad-scope open-access journal (Cuomo 2021). Unlike other open-access titles in the ASM portfolio, *Spectrum* was launched as a sound-science journal, which means that submissions would be evaluated based on scientific

rigor rather than perceived impact or novelty. While direct submissions were expected, a primary reason for launching the journal was to provide a transfer option for authors of rejected articles from ten of ASM's primary research titles (commonly known as a cascade journal model). For these reasons, the journal was predicted to grow quickly, and it was expected that ASM would need to recruit around 400 editors across the spectrum of the microbial sciences to handle a large volume of submissions.

In January 2021, Dr. Christina Cuomo was chosen to serve as the editor-in-chief of the journal. Prior to the relaunch in April 2021, Dr. Cuomo and ASM staff began recruiting members for *Spectrum*'s editorial board. Because of the anticipated submission volume, the editor role at *Spectrum* requires individuals who can independently handle manuscripts throughout the entire peer review process. This ensures a timely experience for authors and minimizes the need for staff intervention. Once an editor takes on an assignment, their responsibility is to perform an initial evaluation of the article for scope and adherence to journal policies. For papers not editorially rejected, the editor must also invite reviewers, read the reviewers' comments, and render appropriate decisions. In addition to editors, the board would also have a leadership team of senior editors to assist with assigning manuscripts and act as a first point of contact for editor questions regarding editorial processes and decisions.

Dr. Cuomo and ASM staff performed the initial recruitment via personal outreach. At launch, the board consisted of five senior editors and twenty editors. All these individuals came from within ASM's community or Dr. Cuomo's network. Assembling this small team was crucial to launching the journal, as it led us to appreciate two challenges. First, growing the board to 400 or so editors in this fashion was simply not feasible, as several individuals declined invitations to join—and it didn't help that the world was still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2021. Second, we began to see that the board was unlikely to become international or develop the kind of diversity we aspired to build if we continued with this approach. Of the five senior editors, only two were based outside of the United States, and finding and recruiting them took quite a bit of effort. Furthermore, all the editors at launch were based in the United States. Even at this early stage, it became clear to staff members and to Dr. Cuomo that *Spectrum*'s success would depend on finding a scalable method for recruiting a diverse group of microbiologists from across the globe to join us in building and running the journal.

As we brainstormed approaches to help us build a large board, we observed a few journals experimenting with the idea of inviting individuals to apply to join their boards. These boards didn't profess to be "open," but they were willing

to review applications and appoint editors based on the journal's needs. We wondered if we could use a similar approach to build a 400-strong board that draws on the expertise of microbiologists working on a range of topics from across the globe.

Application Process

In April 2021, the same month as the relaunch, journal staff posted an application form on the journal's homepage. The form included questions about personal/demographic information and scientific expertise. For demographic questions on gender, applicants were given the option to self-describe or respond "prefer not to disclose." For race and ethnicity, applicants were allowed to make more than one selection, self-describe, or respond "prefer not to disclose."

The form inquired about the following information to gauge the applicant's relevant scientific and peer review expertise:

- scientific expertise within the microbial sciences
- publication record (with a focus on first and corresponding author papers)
- prior experience as a reviewer or editor
- commitment to the journal's mission of open access, open data, and sound science

A copy of the current survey can be found at https://journals.asm.org/journal/spectrum/open-board.

ASM had not done rolling open calls for editors at this scale before, so this was new for staff, the editor-in-chief, and our volunteer leadership. *Spectrum*'s staff members had to craft an entirely new approach for the creation and management of the open call. Staff needed to make a variety of decisions, including where the call would be placed on the journal website, how to collect applicant information, and how to evaluate applicants.

We decided to place a link to the call on our Board of Editors page so any microbiologist looking at the journal's board could easily find the form. We built the form using Microsoft Forms so we could see the applicant data in real time. Over time, the questions have changed slightly; however, the basic information we collect focuses on assessing whether an applicant has reasonable research experience to independently handle the peer review of manuscripts. Once the call was posted, it was promoted on multiple social media platforms, from X (formerly Twitter) to LinkedIn, and through other conventional marketing campaigns directed at ASM members and authors.

Selection Process

We reviewed and shortlisted applications every month. The main criteria for consideration were as follows:

- Does the applicant have appropriate scientific experience in the microbial sciences (i.e., are they above the postdoctoral or trainee level)?
- Does the applicant have enough experience with the peer review process to act independently as an editor with little intervention from staff (i.e., could they search for/invite appropriate reviewers and make editorial decisions based on their comments)?
- Does the applicant understand the mission/purpose of the journal (i.e., would they be able/willing to make decisions based on scientific rigor alone)?

Demographic information, such as gender identity, geographic location, race, and ethnicity, was taken into consideration during the selection process; however, demographic information was and is still not used as a determining factor.

Presently, one staff member with scientific expertise commits time to reviewing at least 100 or so qualified applicants and providing a rationale for shortlisting candidates; this occurs on a monthly basis. Ideally, this task is performed by more than one person to improve workload efficiency and prevent unconscious bias. However, at the time of the launch, there was only one dedicated editorial staff member for the journal who had both the time and scientific expertise to judge these candidates. The number of dedicated staff has grown to four since then, but both capacity and scientific expertise are still a challenge.

As a first pass, the staff member reviewed the applicants' publication records and interest in editorial work. Regarding the publication record, applicants needed to have published three to four corresponding author papers from their own laboratory. Interest in editorial work was gauged both quantitatively and qualitatively. The former was a simple question asking how many hours the applicant could commit to editorial work. Regarding the latter, the applicant was asked to express why they wished to serve as an editor–which we recognized may be a potential obstacle for applicants whose primary language was not English. As the process evolved, all applicants with reasonable

publication records and willingness to commit time and effort to learning the editorial process were shortlisted.

As a second pass, the staff member further narrowed down the list based on the applicants' areas of focus within microbial sciences and how this matched with submissions coming to the journal. The most important determinant for selection remains the applicants' primary areas of scientific expertise. When shortlisting applicants, the staff member focused on scientific areas where the journal needed additional editors due to submission volume. For example, when the journal was launched in mid-2021, we were overwhelmed by the number of COVID-related submissions. Applicants with expertise on a wide range of topics, from COVID serology to coronavirus biology, were quickly on-boarded as editors. More recently, there has been a greater emphasis on recruiting microbiologists working in clinical diagnostics and environmental sciences.

Finally, the staff member sent the list to the editor-in-chief to review and make a final decision. Besides additional staff effort, applicant selection is considerable additional work for the editor-in-chief, who has to review close to fifty to sixty shortlisted applicants each month. Once again, this is a task that would ideally be divided among more than one judge. At the time of the launch, this was not possible due to the small size of the editorial leadership team. As the board has grown since then, having additional senior editors act as judges is something that we are considering for the future.

Onboarding

The editor-in-chief sent invitations to all the chosen applicants to join the board. From there, journal staff contacted the new editors to start the onboarding process. First, journal staff asked the editors to fill out a short form to provide information to help with adding the editors to the submission system and the journal website. Next, journal staff invited editors to attend an hour-long onboarding call to go over the journal scope, the editor role and responsibilities, and how to handle different types of article submissions (i.e., direct submissions versus transfers). Staff always recorded the meetings so that editors located in different time zones could view the information asynchronously. Journal staff also created a web resource for editors that includes detailed procedural information. For ongoing support, editors were encouraged to reach out to both staff and senior editors with questions either via email, the submission system, or the journal Slack channel. An important thing to note is that several of these tasks rely on the support of various internal support teams, not just the journal (*Spectrum*) staff and the editor-in-chief.

Results

Between April 1, 2021, and November 30, 2022, *Spectrum* received 1,994 applications to the Open Board. The main demographic highlights regarding geographic location, gender identity, race, and ethnicity are as follows:

- More applicants identified as men than as women (73.6% versus 25.6%, respectively) (Figure 1).
- Applicants were from 89 distinct countries. Of these, 51% were from either the United States or China (Figure 2).
- 48.1% identified as Asian (including East, South, and Southeast Asian), and 29.5% identified as White (Figure 3).
- Of the applicants from the United States, fewer than half (41%) identified as White. The largest number of candidates that identified as Hispanic or Latino/a were also from the United States (Figure 3).

Of these candidates, as of November 30, 2022, 316 were selected to serve as editors (15.8%). Some key demographic highlights include the following:

- The board is near gender parity, with 52.2% of editors identifying as men and 45.3% of applicants identifying as women (Figure 1).
- Editors were from 40 distinct countries. Of these, fewer than half were from the United States (41.5%), and the second largest represented country was China (13.6%) (Figure 4).
- Fewer than half of the editors (43.4%) identified as White, and 32.6% identified as Asian (including East, South, and Southeast Asian) (Figure 3).
- Of our US-based editors, slightly fewer than half (48.9%) identified as White. The majority of editors who identified as Hispanic or Latino/a or Black were from the United States (Figure 3).

Discussion

Benefits of the Open Board Call

Overall, the use of the Open Board call was successful in that it provided the journal with many viable and diverse candidates. By being deliberate in our evaluation process, we have built a board that is close to gender parity, has a majority of non-White editors, and has over 50% of editors who are based outside the United States. This latter point is important, as ASM is a US-based organization. Historically, most editors on ASM's boards have been from the United States, so having this level of country representation on a board is a significant achievement for our organization. While it is a broad indicator of racial and ethnic diversity, it is also notable that fewer than 50% of our US-based editors identify as White. This level of demographic and geographic diversity would have been difficult to achieve via a traditional nomination process.

> **"[It] has been useful to be on the editor-side of the publication process and to handle a wide variety of papers and work through both how reviewers critique different papers and how a wide group of authors respond [when revising their papers]."**

The Open Board has also provided a pathway of advancement to the senior editor role for high-performing editors. Currently, we have eight senior editors who initially joined us as editors (one of whom is our first senior editor from China). Also, while we do not have an exact number, we believe that we also have considerable representation from untenured researchers at the assistant professor level (at least one-quarter) who are early in their careers. These individuals would not have been identified via a traditional nomination process. Being on the editorial board is helpful for them to advance their own careers and gain more visibility in their field of study. In a recent editor survey,

many of our early career editors expressed that their experience at the journal has helped them gain a better understanding of the peer review process:

> **"[I've gained] a better understanding of what the peer review process actually entails. It's definitely improved how I interact with journals as an author and reviewer."**

Furthermore, our early career editors also expressed that the editor role has made them feel more included in the scientific process as a whole:

> **"The aspect of my editorial work at Spectrum that has been the most rewarding is the scientific rigor of the studies that are published and the support received when I raise any concerns or questions. I truly feel that I am contributing to disseminating high-quality science."**

> **"I enjoy seeing the science that is being produced and feeling like I am assisting in the process of publication."**

Because of the success of the Open Board approach at *Spectrum*, other journals within the ASM Journals program have started their own open calls

for available editor positions. These open calls are at a smaller scale and for more specific editorial roles (i.e., editors for specific subject areas or journal sections), but the hope is that opening the process and making it more transparent will help us to gain more diverse candidates as a program.

Challenges

Gender Balance

Despite the success of the open call in creating greater diversity and inclusion within the board, there were limitations in terms of creating equity. The most visible disparity was in the gender balance of applicants, as only 25% of applicants identified as women (Figure 1). One primary reason for this is due to the regional variation in candidates who identified as women, particularly among the countries with the highest applicants. Only 15% of Chinese applicants identified as women, compared with 32% of applicants in the United States. In China, while women constitute almost half of the workforce in science and technology roles, they are still underrepresented in leadership and senior roles in the sciences. According to the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology, women account for only 6% of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' members (Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China 2021).

The representation of women in science, however, is a global issue. There have been multiple studies indicating that women are underrepresented as authors (Bendels et al. 2018) and that they are less likely to be corresponding authors on papers either due to bias in peer review or because they are more likely to defer corresponding authorship to a coauthor compared with male colleagues (Fox and Pain 2019). Unfortunately, this trend has also been noted in a recent analysis of authorship in ASM journals (Hagan et al. 2020), which found that women who were senior authors were underrepresented in submissions compared to global and societal estimates of microbiology researchers. Furthermore, manuscripts with corresponding authors who were women received more negative outcomes compared to those with men who were corresponding authors. In marketing the open call to past ASM authors, this may have been a contributing factor in the gender disparity of our applicants (i.e., more men than women).

Another potential factor is that women are less likely to self-nominate compared to men (Bosquet et al. 2019). One reason for this may be that women are more likely to have other professional or family obligations, so they may not

have the time or capacity to take on additional responsibilities (Guarino and Borden 2017; Roper 2019).

Geographic Reach

While we attracted candidates from eighty-nine countries, over half of the applicants were from only two countries: the United States and China. This is not surprising, given the strength of microbiology research programs in both of these countries. The research output from China in the past five years has grown dramatically, and this is also reflected in ASM's authorship base and our reach. According to the 2019/2020 ASM Annual Journals report (internal data), over half of our corresponding authors were from either North America or Asia (33% and 40%, respectively), with very small percentages from South America and Africa (3% and 2%, respectively). Marketing the open call to past ASM authors likely contributed to the geographic representation of our applicants. Furthermore, a recent analysis of over 300,000 biological science manuscripts by Smith et al. (2023) has shown that authors in African, Asian, and Latin American countries are more likely to have had their articles rejected compared to authors from North America, Europe, or Oceania (i.e., countries with a greater number of native English speakers). Because one of the key criteria that we look for in applicants is their publication record, this may have also impacted our selection process.

Another factor to consider is internet access, as applicants must have an internet connection to both apply to and participate on the board. If a researcher does not have affordable or reliable internet access, this could make it more challenging for them to apply to the board and to participate in the peer review process, which is mostly digital. For example, many universities in Africa do not have access to high-speed broadband, and the price of internet in West African countries is among the highest in the world (Bashir 2020).

Race and Ethnicity

Overall, applicants from the United States and China have influenced the racial and ethnic composition of our applicant pool, as the majority identified as either Asian or White. Asian applicants were mainly from China and the United States and White applicants were mainly from the United States. While fewer than half of our US-based editors identify as White, only 20% of our editors are classified as "underrepresented minorities" within the biomedical sciences by the National Science Foundation (i.e., defined as "Hispanics or Latinos, Blacks or African Americans, and American Indians or Alaska Natives," and

"Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders") (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics 2023, 3, 11).

Recent studies have found disturbing evidence that non-White scientists face significant disparities compared with their White colleagues. Not only are they underrepresented on editorial boards, but they also experience longer waiting times during peer review as well as lower citations for published articles (Liu, Rahwan, and AlShebli 2023). These inequalities can adversely affect the progress of their academic careers. Because one of the key criteria that we look for in applicants is their publication record, this may have also impacted our selection process.

Preferred Pronouns

We also learned that DEI-related questions aren't universally interpreted or understood. For example, in an earlier iteration of the application form, we asked candidates to state their preferred pronouns within a free text field (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). This question seemed to be well understood by over 70% of candidates in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Israel, and Australia. However, candidates from other countries did not always seem to understand what was being asked. For example, rather than provide a list of pronouns, they would provide their title (Dr., Prof., Mr., Mrs., etc.), their name, or their position (scientist, virologist, etc.). This was prevalent in some Asian countries (e.g., China and India), South America, and some European countries (e.g.,France and Denmark). (See Supplementary Table 1 for more details.) It's possible that this was due to a language barrier or that these countries have a different cultural understanding of pronouns and gender identity.

Proposed Solutions

Despite these challenges, we were able to ensure a reasonable gender and geographic balance among the board members. However, as highlighted above, it is important to recognize that simply opening the board does not in itself create equity. While the call is open to all scientists with microbiology expertise, this does not automatically result in scientists from across the globe submitting applications to our board. Besides professional commitments, there may be social and institutional factors that prevent them from participating.

We are acutely aware of this, and as we continue to grow this board, we plan to partner with regional organizations and educational institutions to

encourage applicants from Africa, Latin America, parts of Europe, and Asia to apply to join us. We are also partnering with the newly formed Inclusive Diversity with Equity, Access, and Accountability (IDEAA) staff team and (sub)committees within ASM to discuss how we can better encourage and support women and those from historically excluded groups. Finally, within the editorial board, we formed a DEI working group to create an ongoing dialogue among our editors about how we can continue to identify areas where better outreach and representation is needed within both *Spectrum*'s community and microbiology as a whole.

Alongside these plans, we have launched a mentoring program for early career microbiologists from across the globe to participate in *Microbiology Spectrum* via a new role: the reviewing editor. The reviewing editor role is distinct from the editor role; while editors choose peer reviewers and make decisions on papers, the reviewing editors serve as reviewers for one to two papers per month (a maximum of twenty-four per year). The candidates are chosen from the existing Open Board applicant pool; we select individuals who have some experience in peer review (e.g., first-author papers, reviewing experience at other journals) but did not meet the full criteria that is sought in an editor who can act independently.

The reviewing editor program is a nascent program that started in April 2022, but a few key highlights from the first year are below:

- The reviewing editors are from twenty-eight distinct countries. Of these, 65% are based outside of the United States and include researchers from countries that are not currently represented on the board in Central/South America, Africa, Northern Europe, and Southeast Asia (Figure 5).
- The number of women exceeds the number of men (54% versus 45%, respectively).
- 35% identify as White, and 33% identify as Asian (Figure 5).

Reviewing editors will advance to the editor role based on their performance and subject area expertise, and this organically creates a pipeline for greater diversity. We recently promoted our first groups of reviewing editors in July 2023 and again in January 2024, and we hope to continue the promotions on a biannual basis.

Conclusion

- The use of the open board call was successful in that it provided the journal with many viable and diverse candidates.
- It is important to recognize that simply opening the board does not in itself create equity.
- Targeted efforts are required to ensure the equitable recruitment of women and researchers in historically underrepresented geographic areas.

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Data Tables

Please click here to view the data table.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. The self-reported gender identity of applicants and selected Editors. Despite a disparity in women versus men applying to the board, *Spectrum* has been able to achieve a near-equal gender balance.

Figure 2. Geographic location of applicants to the Open Board. The color level of the country indicates the number of applicants, and the top three countries are highlighted. Applicants were from eighty-nine countries; however, just over half were from the United States and China.

Figure 3. Self-reported racial and ethnic identities of applicants and selected editors globally and in the United States. Overall, most applicants identified as Asian (including East, South, and Southeast Asian), and fewer than half identified as White.

Figure 4. Geographic location of selected editors. The country's color level indicates the number of editors from that country. The top three countries, the United States, China, and France, are highlighted. A total of forty distinct countries are represented.

Figure 5. Geographic location and racial and ethnic identity of reviewing editors. Countries named here are countries not currently represented on the board. Overall, this group is more diverse than the editors. Eighty-six countries

are represented, and most reviewing editors are from outside the United States. Fewer than half of them identify as White, and slightly over half identify as women (not shown here).

Better Stories, Better Sustainability

How Authentic Storytelling Can Lead University Presses into the Future

Sophia Latorre-Zengierski

Abstract

The university press, responsible for credentialing and disseminating knowledge from the university out into the world, faces twenty-first-century challenges that build on the strains that began with the decline of the monograph. Encountering financial pressure, new competition, and the uncertainty of the multimodal digital space and era of fake news, university presses have been forced to take on projects outside their original mission to survive. But they can do better. Through careful examination of their strengths and values, which are often rooted in the Humanities, university presses can take back their stories and enter this difficult marketplace with confidence about who they are and what they hope to achieve. Authenticity and story ownership will allow presses to thrive in this complex, multi-stakeholder environment as they tread the balance between art and business. The strategies and themes explored herewith are applicable to any organization.

Introduction

Established as a charity or department of a university, university presses are silent artists. Their focus is on credentialing new scholars and disseminating knowledge from the university to the world. In contrast to commercial publishers, they pride themselves on their prioritization of quality scholarly

work over financial gain, and they are judged on the character of their content above all else, letting their publications speak for themselves (Dougherty 2017, 15). In fact, the nonprofit status of many university presses and the subsidies drawn from their home universities have meant that business has never had to be at the forefront of how university presses operate.

But the question of how to balance mission and profitability has jeopardized university presses and the art they practice. The decline of the monograph, beginning in the 1970s (Thompson 2005, 93), forced presses to reevaluate their publishing strategies—something they have never quite been able to recover from. Despite best efforts, even renowned presses are closing, like Dartmouth (Office of Communications 2018), or facing the loss of university monetary support, like Stanford (Scott 2019). The past thirty years have seen the consolidation of academic publishing (Thompson 2005, 121), but this declining market, especially in the humanities (Nielsen 2015), faces even more stressors in the digital space. To survive, presses have become protectionist, placing profitability over mission.

A reexamination of a press's mission and values can allow a press to be intentional about its content, process, and audience. Owning their process and the authorship of their content, while exercising a sensitivity to the constraints and possibilities of a modern multi-stakeholder digital publishing environment, allows for better, more sustainable positioning in this volatile market. By effectively weaving this authenticity into their organizational story and crafting a strong, positive narrative, university presses can move from worrying about merely surviving to focusing on thriving in the twenty-first century as both businesses and artists.

Press Context

A Brief History

Founded on the principle of disseminating university knowledge, presses found their beginnings in the Humanities, especially Literature, the first subject in the Humanities. Amid decreasing enrollment and funding, the Humanities have struggled in recent years—and presses alongside them—but the Humanities remain a key discipline, teaching us empathy, critical thinking, and vision. It is the connection to vision and values that can give presses a renewed strength.

Today, the Association of University Presses (AUP) boasts 140 members across the globe, 110 of which are fully accredited presses affiliated with a university. This 110 can be divided into three main groups. The United

Kingdom-based university presses Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press are in a league of their own, with scale and resources American university presses will likely never reach. The "Big Ten" comprise the largest United States-based university presses (Johns Hopkins University Press, University of California Press, University of Chicago Press, New York University Press, Columbia University Press, MIT Press, University of Pennsylvania Press, Princeton University Press, Harvard University Press, and Yale University Press). These presses, although they maintain a strong connection to their universities, are not subsidized by the universities in any way. They are profitable to the point of being self-sustaining—if only just. The remaining presses receive university support, allowing them to operate at a loss. Theoretically, this loss means they can publish more mission-driven work. Often, these university presses are regionally-based, telling not only the story of their universities, but also of their states, regions, and cultures.

Current Market Dynamics

Since the 1970s, university presses have had to manage the decline of the monograph, which has historically been university presses' primary revenue stream. Through strategic list-building, presses have come up with two main ways to combat the monograph's decline: textbooks and trade books.

"List-building" first emerged as a term in the 1980s (Thompson 2005, 58) referring to acquisitions editors taking a more active role in crafting their discipline lists. Editors began to question how broad or specialized a list should be now that libraries, in response to budget constraints and larger spending in information technology (Thompson 2005, 98-99), were no longer purchasing monographs in the same way. Widening the book format that a press could publish seemed like an easy and responsible way to hedge against risk.

Compared to the monograph, textbooks seem a much more reliable and predictable revenue model. With lower prices coupled with the fact that students buy textbooks every year (especially in large survey courses), a textbook can sell much more volume and have a higher net profit margin of 15-20% versus the more typical 5-10% of a commercial trade title (Thompson 2005, 62).

Still, the allure of trade books has long attracted publishers across the publishing industry—university presses are no exception. However, by their nature, trade books carry more risk than academic publishing. A trade publisher will often rely on the sales of a single title to carry the entire list (Thompson 2005, 146-148). Furthermore, trade books function on the notion of selling

to the general (or non-scholarly) reader. This vague and amorphous reader is difficult to market and sell to; in fact, the general reader may be nothing but an illusive industry myth.

Shrinking enrollments in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the rise of professional schools also contribute to these list shifts (Dougherty 2017, 5). PubTrack data shows that between 2011 and 2014, English experienced a 37.5% drop in discipline performance with the market size dropping from $330,952,430 to $206,739,177 (Nielsen 2015). This trend is consistent across both "Big 5" publishers (Penguin Random House, Hachette, HarperCollins, Macmillan, and Simon & Schuster) and university presses in this space. This hits university presses especially hard because many were founded in the Humanities, particularly Literature (Dougherty 2017, 56).

Over time, a schism has formed between university presses' original Humanities values and the need to stay afloat. Publishing leadership wrestles with the question: How do we balance our mission as a scholarly entity with the need to be profitable?

Content and Audience

To consider a solution for university presses—both in terms of performance and organizational storytelling—it is important to understand the book-making process. This process is upheld by two central pillars: content and audience.

Composition: Content is King

While a book is a tangible object, what university presses—and indeed all publishers—really trade in are ideas. Never has this been felt so acutely as in the twenty-first century, where the book takes many formats, from audiobook to ebook to multimodal text. Regardless of medium, what makes a book sell is its content.

The problem is that it is not always immediately evident what makes good content. It is subjective. This is what has led publishers to adopt a "frog model" wherein they sign many titles and hope that a few will make it and pull in sales. Typically, about 20% of the titles on a given list will pay for the remaining 80% (Thompson 2005, 44). Even if an acquisitions editor feels confident a title will be in that 20%, it is very difficult to estimate exactly *how* well that title might do. Because scholarly publishing relies on a low-volume/high-price model with some monographs around the $95 mark (Thompson 2005, 223), content commissioning becomes crucial—the material has to merit the price tag.

The changed market has forced acquisitions editors to rethink how content fits into their portfolios. The University of Pennsylvania Press operates within a ranking system to show how important a title is to the list (Eric Halpern, pers. comm., April 18, 2019). Greg Britton, Editorial Director at Johns Hopkins University Press, asserts that presses are narrowing their focus towards niches within the discipline in order to be "the leading press in the field… if we're not leading in the field, we don't want to be in it" (Greg Britton, pers. comm., April 5, 2019). It is a technique that has worked well for Hopkins, which dominates in spaces like History of Medicine.

Content is integral to a press' identity because it makes up their symbolic capital. It is the scaffolding of a press' identity and must be managed very carefully. A manuscript rejection might occur not because the content itself lacks academic merit but because "publishing it would be like putting the wrong character into a novel, a figure who might throw the whole thing off balance or radically change it" (Calasso and Dixon 2016, 11). Like a mismatched stroke of color in a painting, a wrong book can affect the whole list. Commissioning is a process where one acceptance affects another. For lists to be as strong as they can be, they must be representative of a press' strengths and values.

Audience: Stakeholders in a Book's Life

In the post-monograph world, university presses are faced with an increasingly multi-sided marketplace and a myriad of external stakeholders, partially due to a broadening audience: authors, faculty, librarians, students, university staff, and the ever-elusive "general reader."

The textbook requires publishers to consult students, a constituency who, with the internet and the advance of the rental model, have more agency than ever before (Alanya Harter, pers. comm., April 8, 2019). Students take to Amazon, Chegg, and publishers' own social media pages to express their frustrations about the rising prices of textbooks and other course materials. Most potently, students speak with their wallets—many simply don't buy their course books (much to an instructor's chagrin). University presses with burgeoning textbooks on their lists have to ask the question: How do we tell students these books are worth buying? Securing a book as a required text (rather than optional reading) is a great start, but this is something that publishers cannot greatly control.

Just like students and their textbooks, the "general reader" may not pay attention to a trade book's publisher, but that does not mean they do not engage; they will seek more of an author's content if they resonate with the author's

work. The problem is that the general reader is amorphous and difficult to market to, especially from a list-based approach (Thompson 2005, 125-133). Rather than trying to contort to please the fickleness of the undefinable general reader, a press may be better off knowing and owning who *they* are regardless of who a general reader may be.

University presses are balancing a complex audience arena. When press identity has traditionally been established through content and process, how do presses maintain consistency about who they are across this expanded stakeholder landscape?

Balancing Market and Mission

The 1970s crisis of the monograph caused the prioritization of mission to erode in favor of economics. Though necessary, the response to the crisis compromised university presses' integrities, which has affected how their organizational stories are perceived by authors and readers. Rather than list triaging to stop the dollar hemorrhaging, university presses can find a healthy balance between market and mission, beginning with storytelling and authenticity.

Organizational Story

What makes a good organizational story? The answer lies at the birthplace of most presses: Literature. As the first Humanities discipline, Literature teaches its students about narrative, imagery, composition, and empathy. Written or oral story illuminates the values of the society from which it originates. However, the greatest teaching of "good story" is connection. A successful story opens a dialogue between writer and reader—or, in the case of an organization, between the organization and its stakeholders.

According to Bolman and Deal (2017, 254), the effects of a strong organizational story include "sparking action, communicating who you are, communicating who the company is, transmitting values, fostering collaboration, taming the grapevine, sharing knowledge, and leading people into the future." To produce these effects, attention must be paid to narrative. Narrative grounds and orients a reader, providing a space for a reader to step into and creating an empathy associated with Literature. "Likability" has been identified as one of the steps and defining factors of persuasion (Cialdini 2001, 76). Empathy and likability cultivated by story are among the most powerful tools to define an organization's sense of self and establish connection and trust. In the absence of a strong narrative, stakeholders become unsure who an organization is and what it hopes to achieve.

Building on empathy and likeability, a press (or other organization) should focus on positive storytelling. This is not to say a press cannot acknowledge challenges, but it should focus on what has gone well in the organization and the possibility of the future for the organization and the industry. The way an organization talks about itself shapes that organization's behavior; positive stories about the future create excitement, build trust and understanding, and generate ideas (Krattenmaker 2001, 5-6). The way a press weaves its story affects its own future in the same way that an author's attention to their work molds it into what a reader sees on the shelf.

Authenticity and Vulnerability

To establish empathy, likeability, and trust in an organization, unrelenting authenticity must be established. An authentic leader is aware of their own values, strengths, and limitations; they show up exactly as they are, no matter the setting, professional or otherwise (Kruse 2013). Used appropriately, authentic leadership builds trusting relationships, creates organizational integrity, and a cultural norm of curiosity (Lencioni 2002). What underpins authenticity is something perhaps even more difficult to achieve: vulnerability.

Vulnerability can be defined as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" (Brown 2017, 274). Vulnerability is well-known by those in creative fields; creativity and innovation are born out of vulnerability. Vulnerability holds a curious tension, however: while the creative process can be insular, almost selfish, the act of sharing work is a gift, allowing others to connect with both the work and the author. In other words, vulnerability shows the audience that they are not alone (Sakasegawa 2019).

Connection is a function of vulnerability; we become more trusting and united through experiencing the truest versions of ourselves and our experiences. High self-awareness and self-concept must be manifested by individuals. Those who do are in a unique position to lead an organization in a more positive way. Authentic leaders are set apart by taking the role not out of selfish ambition, but rather as a way of promoting a goal they care about deeply (Shamir and Eilam 2005, 397). This notion can be applied to organizations: a successful organization executes its mission as a function of its authenticity.

Johns Hopkins University Press is an excellent example. It was founded in 1878 as the first United States university press. The university itself was built on the German model as a research institution with the press as an extension of itself, trying to garner the greatest reach for scholars (Greg Britton, pers. comm., April 5, 2019). Unlike many publishers, Hopkins has embraced digital

media as an extension of their purpose. They created a seamless process where everything is published both in print and digitally, pioneering Project MUSE, a digital aggregator for libraries and a dominant player in that market. The platform creates collaboration between 250+ university presses and libraries in a digital space; the platform itself is embedded in Hopkins' mission of achieving greater reach. In fact, Project MUSE feeds them data which allows them to better analyze their lists, acquisitions, and branding. It is an authentic step for them to take, and by taking it, they reinforce their organizational story, crafting an image of a sophisticated global publisher committed to moving scholarship as far out into the world as possible.

Strengths and Values

Authenticity allows leaders and organizations to gain clarity about their values, getting to the heart of their true selves (Shamir and Eilam 2005, 396)—that is, to develop an awareness and understanding of their organizations' strengths and values. This awareness is particularly important when navigating a difficult climate and other challenges. In contrast to Johns Hopkins University Press, small regional presses, such as the University of Missouri Press or the University Press of Colorado, are subject to the same difficulties as their larger press counterparts but without the same resources; they have had to learn how to do more with less. How does a press maintain a clarity of values in light of this constraint? Perhaps the answer lies further south than Hopkins' Baltimore.

The University Press of Mississippi is unique even amongst regional presses because it is the truest consortium (Steven Yates, pers. comm., May 1, 2019). Founded in the 1970s, the press was a joint venture staked by eight universities in the state. Based on enrollment, each of these universities paid (and continues to pay now) a set contribution to the press' annual operating costs. From birth, the press was a deliberately collaborative effort, in part because Mississippi is a small state with scarce resources. Their mission was two-fold: to contribute to the scholarly publishing conversation, especially by recruiting top academics, and to tell the story of Mississippi as a state.

The second piece of their mission has become a key strength and fuels their story as a press. From the beginning, they valued authenticity, not wanting to let a New York publisher tell the state story. As a southern state, Mississippi has its fair share of grave historical sins, and the press wanted to grapple with that as only a local publisher could. This has led to a strong list in Black Folklore, the Civil Rights Movement, and African American Literature as the press explores

questions of "who was left out, who was left behind and who was lynched" (Steven Yates, pers. comm., May 1, 2019).

Additionally, Mississippi has developed a world-renowned comics list, which grew organically from the press' focus on the Humanities. The list started with Charlie Brown and blossomed to include titles like *Of Comics and Men*, a French translation covering the entire American comics industry. The press recognized they were developing something strong under editor Walter Biggins, so when he left, they continued to develop this list not only because it sold but because it was representative of where the press came from and what it could be.

With consistent sales in their key lists, the University Press of Mississippi places a strong value on the people and culture it represents. It is their honesty and commitment that shines through across their lists: From a collection of Eudora Welty's photographs to books on Mississippi's renowned blues festivals, the press tells the story of who they are through its publications. That is why comic scholars and southern historians flock to them, further perpetuating their organizational story. By understanding and leveraging who they are, the University Press of Mississippi has become known for its areas of strength.

Framing and Narrative

Framing aids in an organization's transformation and narrative. Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal in *Reframing Organizations* (2017, 10) explain, "A frame is a mental model—a set of ideas and assumptions—that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory. A good frame makes it easier to know what you are up against and, ultimately, what you can do about it."

Princeton University Press, unlike Hopkins, which embraced the digital space from the get-go, or Mississippi, which held its ground, actively grappled with the changing industry dynamics of ebooks and digital products. As a primarily Humanities publisher, Princeton struggled to adapt to shrinking enrollments and changes within the disciplines. It considered how it might positively reframe and, taking a cue from its home university, the press began to integrate emerging fields within its already established lists, such as Graphic Design within the Art and Art History fields (Dougherty 2017, 25). This collaborative approach reinforced its identity as an innovative scholarly press as it became known for work in this new sub-discipline within the Arts.

Princeton also approached the trade book through a new lens. Instead of seeking out titles "on a particular important topic written by an authority,"

Princeton editors sought out potential trade titles that "draw a drop of emotion from readers." Shiller's economics trade title *Irrational Exuberance* did exactly this by drawing on real questions the public had surrounding the stability of the stock market in the early 2000s. In this way, Princeton was able to carve out a trade list that made sense for them, one where they didn't feel like they were veering far from their original mission of "enrich[ing] the global conversation" (Dougherty 2017, 37).

Through reframing and acknowledging the failures of many post-monograph era responses, university presses will be able to re-envision their own possibility and rise to the challenge of authentic list building in the twenty-first century.

Ethics and Authorship

The university press world is a cyclical industry, dependent on stakeholder feedback. Crafting an authentic organizational story within this circle raises questions about ownership. Presses are, after all, in the business of ideas. More than a physical product, ideas and creative material are highly sensitive and highly personal. When so many people work on a manuscript, who really owns it? A press' identity is dependent on the books it produces, but is that book property that the press can use freely for its own story? How can a press use a book to benefit all parties—namely, the author and the press?

Messaging and Interdependence

Princeton University Press Director Christie Henry asserts that, "As books can't be marketed without author's names, it is hard to decouple authors from press promotions initiatives" (Christie Henry, pers. comm., April 18, 2019). As such, what emerges is a highly interdependent relationship, where the press and the author lean on each other on the climb to success. Working with respected authors increases a press' symbolic capital; likewise, an author can improve their reputation by publishing with a reputable press (Thompson 2005, 71). Novelist, professor, and textbook author Michael Kardos (pers. comm., April 22, 2019) comments, "That's certainly one way I evaluate a press: by seeing whom they publish."

Material and Ownership

If material is not the exclusive property of the artist, or in the case of the author or researcher, whose is it? Erwin Glikes (2001, 52), in his essay "The Editor

in the Marketplace," has a very simple answer: The manuscript belongs to the acquisitions editor, not only because the editor found the manuscript and saw potential in it, but also because they are the advocate for that manuscript and that author. While the book-making process is touched by many people, it is the acquisitions editor who builds "a house within a house" (Glikes 2001, 51), creating that initial enthusiasm that then ripples out to the discipline team, the larger organization, and even the world. In this way, the manuscript belongs to everyone.

Author and Press Values Alignment

When an author's work reflects the press' mission and values, they can integrate into a press' organizational story exceptionally well. Take the example of Princeton University Press and Albert Einstein. *The Meaning of Relativity*, published in 1922, put Princeton University Press on the map when it was less than twenty years old (Dougherty and Bertrand 2016). Since then, the press has established a whole suite of titles concerning Einstein. These titles are not confined to Physics but also represent Einstein as a person, both scientist and humanist. The titles include a collection of love letters, books on his politics, a modern English translation of five critical papers he published in his "miraculous year" of 1905, and *The Ultimate Quotable Einstein*. Princeton embraces Einstein not only for his greatness but also because he and his work represent much of what the press believes. His scholarship brought fields together in a liberal tradition just as the press strives to create "an ongoing conversation between those two fields [the Arts and Sciences] in the form of books, which uniquely serve to synthesize, connect, and nurture cross-disciplinary discourse" (Dougherty and Bertrand 2016). Princeton honors Einstein in an authentic way, paying tribute to their core values.

Authors are part of a press's story, just as presses are part of an author's story. Presses often highlight award-winning authors on their websites, absorbing them into their identity. Though the ownership of a manuscript is contested—author, acquisitions editor, publisher, or perhaps no one at all—it is clear that where books and presses align, they can become powerful advocates for each other.

Author Care and Inspiring Evangelists

The press-author relationship can be symbiotic, where their joint ownership over the manuscript supports both parties, reinforcing one another's credibility. Senior Editor at the University of California Press Maura Roessner explains,

"Authors and publishers often seek each other out because their 'brands' are mutually enforcing." The press "often says" that they publish "authors," not just "books," and likewise, authors say that they are not just an author, but a *University of California* author. (Maura Roessner, pers. comm., April 24, 2019). This is a positive, cyclical relationship between press and author, balanced fundamentally on author care.

Author care is how a publisher treats an author, making them feel like a valuable part of their list. Even authors with lower revenue titles require attention because all authors can become strong advocates for their press within their disciplines. Author treatment greatly affects a press' image and future commissions. "While smaller presses can have marketing issues," explains Professor Samuel Cohen, "my bias against the very big presses outweighs it, because my sense is that with some, you're not getting enough development, copyediting and other kinds of attention" (Samuel Cohen, pers. comm., May 7, 2019). Moreover, how a press supports its authors, large and small, is a tangible reflection of its organizational values.

Supporting Key Authors

At the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) in 2016, Professor Janet Burroway was vocal about wanting to move her book, *Imaginative Writing* (the leading Creative Writing textbook), to a university press for a more supportive environment than what she received at Pearson. Many authors sought better author care after Pearson cut 4,000 employees, including its entire English team (which is now being outsourced to a single editor at Ohlinger) in 2016 (Cavanagh 2016). Burroway believed in the value of her textbook, which suggested that "teaching writing is teaching failing," something intrinsic to a student's learnings; she sought a publisher that agreed, believing the answer was a university press (Janet Burroway, pers. comm., March 15, 2019).

In 2018, Burroway moved to the University of Chicago Press and gained access to a dozen-strong team, from publicists to financial planners. An off-site launch party at AWP formally announced the book to the community and publicly cemented the partnership between Professor Burroway and the press. Since then, Burroway has become an evangelist for Chicago UP, speaking out about her positive experience to her colleagues and students. With this new wave of support and excitement, it seems likely *Imaginative Writing* will continue to dominate the market, lending Chicago UP credibility in Creative Writing, building on its strong list in Literature and Literary Criticism.

Engaging authors like this can be a game-changing resource for presses. But not every author is a big name like Burroway.

Supporting Smaller Authors

How do presses support authors with smaller titles and make them feel like they are valued? A good example might be James Turner's *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities*, published at Princeton University Press. Recondite in subject matter, Turner's manuscript was initially rejected by several editors at the press. To commission it, Acquisitions Editor Peter Dougherty (Peter Dougherty, pers. comm., May 7, 2019) developed an editorial strategy tailored specifically to the manuscript; he "came up with an effective title and subtitle, commissioned a strong design, priced it well, and guided it towards reviewers who found its argument compelling." The result was not only strong reviews, but sales. Care, a fundamental press value, paid off for Turner. However, for regional presses like the University of Colorado Press, where the marketing department is two people strong, this carefully developed editorial strategy may seem like a leap (Beth Svinarich, pers. comm., May 12, 2019). Perhaps embracing the digital age makes sense.

Digital Storytelling

Organizational storytelling has moved into the digital arena, a great space to engage with all different elements of the publishing community. Social media has effectively replaced the traditional campus call and bookstore work in the acquisitions process. It is much harder to find people on campus—especially adjuncts, who often teach at multiple universities––and harder to justify the costs associated with the in-person sales call.

Twitter (now X) has ironically become one of the most bookish places on the internet. Despite its character limit per tweet, the platform is home to an active community of writers, editors, and agents. Academics flock to the platform as well, particularly those in Humanities fields like Literary Criticism, Children's Literature, and Pop Culture. (Although the recent acquisition of Twitter by Elon Musk has forced many academics to leave and try out other tools, like Mastodon.) Editors can analyze trends in Twitter conversations and even join them to acquire manuscripts. In this way, social media allows both editors and presses to show themselves as active, attentive, and curious about what is happening in the field. If a press' mission is rooted in the dissemination of knowledge and service to the discipline, social media is a cost-effective

way to tap into those values and show commitment to the larger academic conversation.

The University Press of Mississippi's publicist Courtney McCreary recounts how, though she used to only meet with the Book Editor at *The New York Times* and similar publications when the press catalog came through, she now meets with the Social Media Manager as well. "The book review sections are physically shrinking," McCreary (Courtney McCreary, pers. comm., May 2, 2019) explains. "You have to be thinking smarter. Where are people still reading? Where are people getting their information? If you compare *The New York Times* Twitter feed against the book review section, their Twitter feed actually has a lot of information on books." Not only does Twitter have more information; it also provides a space for interaction where a print newspaper cannot. Readers can immediately comment and share––not always in a positive way. As such, publishers must take care of how they monitor these responses, for they, too, play into a press' character.

Book identities—which cumulatively compose press identities—are ripe for social media, especially where the title may not be that high on the discipline list. Social media is an often free or inexpensive alternative to expensive print publicity that achieves trackable reach (Courtney McCreary, pers. comm., May 2, 2019). In 2017, Cambridge University Press used social media to successfully bolster Jared Rubin's *Rules, Religion and Riches: Why the West Got Rich and the Middle East Did Not* (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). To promote the book, the press utilized both their channels and Rubin's channels, cross-pollinating across the two. Whenever a rave review came in, Rubin tweeted it while tagging key stakeholders in the discipline. This created over 200,000 impressions; the concurrent paid Facebook campaign had a reach of 6,414 and 393 engagements (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). Similarly, the press created a special hashtag (#DoingCapitalism) for Bill Janeway's *Doing Capitalism in the Innovation Economy*, which helped it reach trending status within the discipline (Ellena Moriarty, pers. comm., May 13, 2019). Links, tags, and hashtags are crucial, allowing both title and press to ripple out to wider communities.

Effective storytelling on social media creates a connection digitally, not unlike the connection forged through vulnerability and authenticity. Online publishers are building a kind of "universal library [where] no book will be an island" (Calasso and Dixon 2016, 47). Indeed, if social media is where people are finding information, stumbling across one book might lead them to another. Acknowledging this connection allows presses to build a network of

values between the books they publish and how those titles fit into the larger discipline story.

Partnership

In this multi-stakeholder landscape, there are other opportunities for collaboration beyond author-press relationships that can further amplify how a press establishes its identity within the scholarly world. When organizations are open and vulnerable to partnership, they can create powerful bonds for enduring industry challenges.

Working with AUP and Home Universities

The 1920s saw a series of dinners emerge after the National Association of Book Publishers meeting. During these dinners, publishers discussed the challenges and opportunities facing presses. This morphed into the Association of American University Presses in 1937 (which has been renamed as the Association of University Presses, or the AUP). Since then, the AUP has served as an advocate for the presses it represents, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century when universities saw an increasing need to corporatize for fear of losing money and libraries began asking for free access to materials.

Alex Holzman (pers. comm., April 18, 2019), former President of AUP, defined the role of the Association as "to reinforce in any way necessary the central role of the university press to scholarship." This language—*any way necessary*—may sound abrasive, but it is reflective of the severe combative nature publishing has taken to survive. When asked what AUP ought to do in the current moment, Holzman replied that they should "represent university presses to all stakeholders in the dissemination of scholarship (faculty, librarians, students, government and administrators)" and "show how benefiting constituents benefits society as a whole with the acknowledgment that the university press community is a kind of Commons."

In this spirit, AUP provides a space for collaboration, facilitating relationships between the presses it represents, the presses and the public, and the presses and their home universities. By working closely with their home university, presses can strengthen the bond that brought them into the world and get closer to their mission. Presses work across the university, talking to librarians, administration, and faculty, who often miss out on the bigger picture because of being siloed in their departments. If presses can truly work closely with their home institution—beyond a syndicate or faculty board approving

titles—they will be much stronger for it, crafting a unified and authentic image of the press and university for the world.

Inter-Press Partnership

Presses have an opportunity for partnerships that commercial publishers do not: each other. As Holzman (pers. comm., April 18, 2019) earlier mentioned, "the university press community is a kind of Commons." Common pool resources are those that are naturally available without real boundaries, but once someone takes some of the resources, there are less for others (Ostrom 2015, 30). It is this story of scarcity that presses have been living with and projecting for decades, but avenues for partnership can reframe the narrative and create an environment where presses are both idiosyncratic and highly collaborative.

Some stakeholders in the press world describe a collaborative environment where editors phone up editors from different houses for help. The University Press of Mississippi's Courtney McCreary recounts being a new publicist and meeting fellow young female publicists at a conference, sharing strategy with each other, though they were from the University of Texas Press and Johns Hopkins University Press. Sharing knowledge bolsters the success of both the organization and the greater network (Crutchfield and Grant 2012, 147). Additionally, it establishes a press as helpful, caring, and collaborative in character—all key qualities that attract authors.

Presses can take a cue from the metaphor in Jeanette Winterson's meta-literary novel *Lighthousekeeping* (2004): "Every light was a story, and the flashes themselves were stories going out over the waves, as markers and guides in comfort and warning." By sharing experiences, presses can help each other navigate both the difficulties and the triumphs, building a collective industry voice. Since the 1970s, presses have been focused on a problem-solving mindset, but drawing on each other's individual strengths, values, and resources may allow presses to wade through the challenges of the digital age together in partnership rather than fighting to stay afloat.

Conclusion

Modern university presses are faced with a very difficult and complex landscape. In the face of globalization, the digital expanse, and a declining market, university presses have defaulted to solutions like expanding into trade or picking up the textbooks dropped by commercial publishers. These problem-oriented solutions may not be sustainable in the long-term. Instead, university

presses could benefit from pausing to truly examine the current publishing landscape, including its stresses and challenges, and how they fit within it.

Large British presses, blessed with scale and resources, have traditionally had the tools to navigate the transitions in the industry and the academy. But not all university presses have been as lucky with available resources and institutional support. Despite their constraints, smaller university presses and regional university presses have seen success in holding fast to their missions by focusing intently on their strengths, as evidenced by their compact and focused title lists. These presses have built up specialized knowledge in key disciplines and are determined to tell the story of the regions and people they represent; their identities and integrity are evidenced through what they publish, how they engage with stakeholders, and how they market themselves. Some smaller presses have embraced the digital space, particularly social media, to communicate their commitment to the discipline and their authors. Others have begun to reach out to sister presses, embracing a network mindset in which they can still be their authentic selves.

Regardless of resources or current tactics, university presses have a choice to make. They can focus on survival strategies in these demanding, digital times. Or they can pause to examine their mission and values, their Humanities origins, and the best way to tell an authentic story about who they are to their authors, readers, and the world. If publishing is an art, it is a press' integrity, molded through the balance of mission and business, that will allow the press to tell its very best, most authentic stories.

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Banned But Not Beaten

Confronting Book Bans from a Utilitarian Perspective

Jay Soglo

Texas. Florida. Missouri. Utah. Pennsylvania. South Carolina. Tennessee. Oklahoma. What do these states have in common? In the last year, over 3,300 books have been banned within their school districts and libraries. Unfortunately, this is not an exhaustive list; there are several other states enacting book bans with the express purpose of politicizing and eliminating books that include themes of history, antiracism, identity, sexuality, and gender. The resurgence of book banning in the United States threatens to reverse hard-fought progress achieved in civil rights and social justice—and it runs contrary to the utilitarian principle of ethics. Utilitarianism states that an action is ethical if the sum of utilities produced by that action is greater than the sum of utilities from any other possible act (PEN America 2023). In other words, actions are morally right if they promote the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Applying the utilitarian principle reveals that recent book bans in the United States fail to promote the greatest good for society; instead, book bans cause significant harm to historically marginalized groups and underscore the need for concerted opposition to this form of censorship. These bans put historically marginalized groups in danger and must be repelled via conscious action by publishers, educators, and concerned citizens.

Banning Books Silences Minority Voices

Many recent book bans enacted within the United States appear to specifically target works by authors of color and LGBTQ+ authors. For example, in Florida, the 2022 Stop WOKE Act, under the guise of regulating the content of instruction and training in schools and workplaces (Staff of Ron DeSantis 2022), attempts to obfuscate, deny, and rewrite history in the United States as it pertains to the racial oppression African Americans have faced. After the passage of the Stop WOKE Act, Floridian Governor Ron DeSantis came under fire by historians and politicians—including Vice President Kamala Harris—who criticized the state's African American history standards that, among other things, portrayed slavery as beneficial for the enslaved (*The New York Times* 2023a).

Similarly, Tennessee Senate Bill 1059, passed on May 4, 2023, makes it a Class E felony for book publishers, distributors, or sellers to "knowingly sell or distribute obscene matter" to K-12 public schools (Tennessee General Assembly 2023). The State of Tennessee defines "obscene" as the average person applying contemporary community standards finding the work "appeals to the prurient interest," or "depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct," or if the work as a whole "lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" (Justia 2021). District attorneys in the state decide if the materials in question meet the state's definition of obscene. These decisions often fail to take into consideration the inherent biases of the prosecuting attorneys. The new law follows a trend of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that punishes deviations from heteronormative social mores (American Civil Liberties Union 2024).

According to PEN America (2023), a nonprofit organization that promotes free expression through literature, from July 2022 to December 2022, 1,477 individual books were banned in 22 states. Some of the most banned books were *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, an autobiographical memoir affirming different perspectives on gender identity, with 15 bans; *The Handmaid's Tale: The Graphic Novel* by Margaret Atwood, a cautionary dystopian novel about a religious patriarchal dictatorship that overthrows the US government and takes away the civil rights of women, with 12 bans; and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, a story about a young black girl who develops an inferiority complex over her dark skin, fueling a desire for blue eyes associated with whiteness, with 10 bans. As of February 2024, each book's total number of bans has increased to 26, 34, and 29, respectively. "Many of these books are removed from student

access before due process of any kind is carried out; in many cases, books are removed before they are even read, or before objections to books are checked for basic accuracy," writes PEN America (2023). Americans are taught not to judge a book by its cover, but isn't this hypocritical when the judgment of books is taken to such extremes?

Weaponizing Censorship for Political Gain

The deliberate prohibition and subsequent destruction of knowledge, be that through decay and neglect or violent means such as burning, is a tactic used to impede the progress of a society or movement (Ovenden 2020). While communities protesting the contents of a particular book is not new, typically, this behavior is initiated by a local community of parents and other interested parties. What is especially concerning today is that state legislators are initiating this behavior as part of a greater political agenda, introducing censorship orders and proposing the tracking and monitoring of the content teachers have control over in the classroom. State legislators are using their power to threaten free expression through the surge of book bans.

In June 2021, DeSantis made the following claims: "The woke class wants to teach kids to hate each other, rather than teaching them how to read, but we will not let them bring nonsense ideology into Florida's schools" (Staff of Ron DeSantis 2021). Assuming that certain books teach children to hate each other rather than teach them how to read requires a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. The notion that the act of reading a book doesn't teach literacy is itself a perversion of the truth and demonstrates a level of bad faith on the part of pro-banning sympathizers. Banning books is counter-intuitive and is not a remedy for those concerned about childhood literacy. The assumption that book bans will benefit children and young people fails to consider the potential harm that this decision can bring to society at large. Instead, it indicates that legislators are likely pursuing the interests of their voter base.

Inflammatory campaign rallies create an echo chamber of prejudice where legislators and constituents openly share opinions and beliefs that are damaging to already marginalized populations without fear of repercussions. Consider this quote from Rashawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons (2021) in their article, "Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?": "[M]any Americans are not able to separate their individual identity as an American from the social institutions that govern us—these people perceive themselves as the system. Consequently, they interpret calling social institutions racist as calling them racist personally" (Ray and Gibbons 2021). Paradoxically, many

people who claim to recognize the United States' racist history are unable to divorce themselves from the false narrative that the country is an equitable democracy (Ray and Gibbons 2021). Recognizing this is important because it gives insight into why some Americans support book banning and may feel that children are being taught to hate one another. They may feel that books educating people about the more sordid details of United States history and the negative consequences that are still being felt from those periods cultivate and perpetuate an "us-versus-them" worldview. Whatever the rationale, banning books will only galvanize further anti-diversity sentiments in the United States and further fan the flames of the divisive culture war currently embroiling the country.

Evaluating Book Bans Through a Utilitarian Lens

When evaluating this issue through a utilitarian lens, in addition to identifying the purported benefits that book banning (e.g., protecting children, upholding community values) as well as the types of harm caused by bans (e.g., limiting access to information, restricting historically marginalized voices and representation), there are other factors to consider: the duration of the harm versus the duration of the supposed benefits, the intensity of the possible harms and benefits, and the likelihood of each are other measures that can be used in this utilitarian calculus. The stated benefits of book banning are protecting children and upholding community values (Staff of Ron DeSantis 2022) with an emphasis on maintaining the parental right to determine what is appropriate for children. The harms of book banning include limiting access to information, muting marginalized voices, and restricting representation (PEN America 2023). Additionally, book bans do not prevent curiosity about banned subjects or the seeking of information on them. However, the lack of proper access to helpful resources leaves those interested vulnerable to misinformation.

In sum, though claimed to uphold communal standards, book bans disproportionately and negatively impact already marginalized voices. In addition, restricting access to ideas limits intellectual discourse and social progress in tangible ways, regardless of the stated intentions behind such restrictions. Proponents of book banning are parenting other people's children by controlling their access to books. Book bans limit the availability of resources that could start natural conversations that parents and children should have in the ways that make them the most comfortable. If the greatest good is the advancement of free expression, open inquiry, and equal access, then the harm caused by book bans far outweighs the benefits. The recent surge of censorship

generates vastly more societal pain than pleasure, pointing to the need for immediate, thoughtful opposition to book bans to promote the greatest good.

Early Signs of Resistance Against State Censorship

Despite certain legislators using political pressure to whip up a censorship frenzy, there have been signs of resistance. The majority of the Florida education group members that came up with the new standards for teaching African American history in the 2022 Stop WOKE Act came out against the sections that drew criticism, stating that only two members out of thirteen pushed for the problematic language (NBC News 2023). One member, State Senator Geraldine Thompson, said, "I don't know who the people were who worked on this… people that you would expect would be involved or at least informed, were not" (NBC News 2023). The lack of transparency among this education group extends to the Florida Education Department, which has refused to disclose how group members were selected or how the new language was decided (NBC News 2023). It is unclear what criteria were used to evaluate members of the education group or how many members were present in each meeting for the discussions (NBC News 2023). In a San Diego library in June 2023, disgruntled neighborhood residents checked out the entire contents of a display promoting Pride month, stating, "To protect our children and the community, we have checked out the books in the Pride display. We plan to keep these books checked out until the library agrees to permanently remove the inappropriate content from the shelves" (*The New York Times* 2023b). In response, nearly two hundred San Diego residents purchased new copies of the books and gave over $15,000 to the library system.

Civic Engagement to Challenge Banning

What can concerned citizens do to help in the fight against book banning? Speaking out about the issue on social media platforms and directly to family members, friends, and neighbors is a good place to start. Writing to local school boards and library administrations to make one's voice heard also helps. Those who oppose book bans can encourage others in their communities to join in the effort and express support for the kind of books they want in their libraries and schools and what that means to them. Concerned students can organize and protest by speaking up at school board meetings. Educators can band together to take their concerns to their school boards and principals to take a stand against censorship in education. Ambitious individuals can build Little Free

Libraries in their neighborhoods and fill them with the books they want to read and enjoy.

What can publishers do to help in the fight against censorship? Publishers can continue to publish controversial books. To increase representation for those holding the pen and those on the page, publishers should make concerted efforts to amplify the voices of diverse authors and partner with booksellers, teachers, and librarians to promote banned books and authors. When called on by censors to pull certain books, rather than self-censor, publishers can stand firm by forcing book banners to follow through with formal processes. Individuals can apply to represent their community as a local library board member.

Conclusion

The contemporary resurgence of book banning across the United States represents an alarming infringement on free speech that disproportionately harms already marginalized communities. This movement, driven by partisan politicization and a misguided rationale of "protecting" children, actively seeks to silence diverse voices and restrict access to representations of identity, history, and human experience. Through a utilitarian ethical lens that weighs the balance of societal benefit versus detriment, book bans create exponentially more harm than any purported good, thus stifling intellectual progress, denying equitable participation, and enabling further systemic injustice. Concerned citizens, educators, students, librarians, and publishers must unite to resist this existential threat proactively. Concerted actions ranging from public advocacy to bolstering alternative book access can push back against state censorship and legislative overreach. In the face of these anti-democratic book-banning efforts, it is a moral imperative to defend freedom of expression and ensure the flourishing of a vibrant civic sphere accessible to all. By taking steps to advocate for the greatest good, people can affirm the power and necessity of free expression and defend the ability of books to share diverse ideas and reflect humanity in all of its variety. The stakes are clear—book bans jeopardize vulnerable populations and must be repelled through our tireless commitment to conscious resistance. "Better never means better for everyone," Margaret Atwood (1985, 256) warns in *The Handmaid's Tale*. "It always means worse, for some."

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Interviews

Publishing Professional Interview: Randy Townsend

Bio:

Randy Townsend, MPS, (he, him, his) translates organizational vision and mission into clear priorities and practical goals to ensure alignment and optimized collaboration. He has been a global leader in policy implementation and publishing strategy. Randy is President of the Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP) and has served in leadership positions for the Council of Science Editors, and AM&P Network's Association Council, and co-chaired DEIA Committees for AM&P Network and SSP. He has actively supported C4DISC and contributed to the development of many of their freely available resources. At Origin Editorial, Randy takes innovative approaches to develop and implement peer review strategies. Randy proudly served as the inaugural Editor in Chief for the GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing and is an Associate Professor of the MPS in Publishing program in the College of Professional Studies at George Washington University.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

In a very general sense, ethics is the difference between right and wrong. The line seems extremely clear from the surface. That formula becomes more complicated when you begin to introduce variables. The way in which I prioritize values and interpret and respond to actions and behaviors are unique to my perspective and are heavily influenced by my experiences and understanding. This grows more complex when you begin introducing more people, perspectives, interests, and activities into the equation. What may seem so right from one perspective may be so wrong from another perspective. That's when you move into the foggy gray areas and have to adapt an ethical framework to navigate the issues.

Because of the power of the published word, whether it's in responsibly reporting groundbreaking research or telling an incredibly rich story, the way in which we publish and who we are as publishers is critically important. Research results can have financial and political implications, and results can become the target of strategic attacks intended to undermine legitimate findings. If the peer review, for example, was flawed or compromised, it can become a thread used to pull apart the research and discredit the researcher. The increased pressure to ban books applied to librarians, schools, and teachers could lead to important stories never seeing the light of day.

Ethics in publishing, to me, means integrity, respect, trust, and process. It's a passionate dance towards understanding the varying degrees of motivating factors that influence the interpretation of ethical dissonance, seeking common ground, and sincerely attempting to reach the "most right" decisions while remaining sensitive to the shortcomings that prevent achieving "absolute right."

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

There are a number of ethical topics that interest me for vastly different reasons. The way in which artificial intelligence impacts the content and the way in which we publish that content is rich with ethical considerations that don't have any easy answers. Despite a number of well-supported activities, there is still a tremendous lack of diversity throughout the publishing industry that has sustained discriminatory practices and pay inequities. Targeted book bans continue to alarm me, and I'm curious to see how these conversations evolve and their overall impact on society.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

As the inaugural Editor-in-Chief of the GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing, it was one of the most rewarding and demanding experiences of my career. John and I aligned on a vision; then, we had to design a blueprint and build an operational structure that infused ethical best practices, guidelines, and student instruction. I was equally inspired by the energy of student enthusiasm and the overwhelming GW faculty and industry support. There seemed to be a universal desire to participate and contribute.

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

Ethics in publishing has played a significant role in the development of my career. When I was early in my career, it was unclear how what I was doing in Production connected beyond successfully validating XML. When I started having ethical conversations and connecting the standards and practices I was responsible for to the people who were being impacted by my actions, it elevated the way in which I approached my work. When I began to identify why and how the content could be threatened and realized the importance of protecting the content, the way in which it is developed, handled, enhanced, and distributed, it became my north star. I started carrying myself a little differently. My actions meant something beyond my cubicle.

What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

I would love to see more students submitting their capstone projects to the journal. When teaching ethics in publishing, I see a number of well-done projects that contribute to important, relevant conversations. If I had a magic wand, I would be able to convince more students to expand on their projects specifically for publication in the journal. The students should feel confident and empowered to publish well-done research, and the journal is the perfect place to elevate those conversations.

Student Interview: Haley Baker

Bio:

Haley Baker graduated from Sonoma State University with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. She is currently studying for a Master of Professional Studies in Publishing at George Washington University, Cohort 18, and will graduate in May 2025. Haley has spent several years in customer service, administrative, accounting, and human resources roles in a variety of fields and she is currently working with the *GW Journal of Ethics* as the Team Lead for the Strategy and Sustainability committee. In addition to being a voracious reader, Haley loves to share her book opinions with anyone who will listen and currently hosts an Instagram book review account, @haleys.book.club.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

Publishing is in a unique position to better humanity, and the industry has been working toward this lofty goal for generations. Historically, there are many areas where publishing has not lived up to that ideal and continues to this day to fall short. This journal is a unique and powerful tool to work toward solutions, and I want to be part of those solutions. I want to build up the parts of the industry that need boosting and complement the aspects that are already accomplishing this. The opportunity to work on the journal provides me with direct access to this goal.

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

Recently, there has been a lot of talk about AI. It is fascinating to ponder the new frontiers that this tool will provide. It will be interesting to see how AI is ultimately regulated to prevent fraud. Also, it will be interesting to see

how much of the hysteria surrounding AI ends up coming to fruition and what ends up just being hype. I am also interested in predatory publishing, specifically, the "publish or perish" landscape. I find it fascinating because, while it is a publishing issue, it crosses boundaries into many disciplines and affects a vast number of people. I would love to see the JEP tackle this.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

My experience has been overwhelmingly positive. The leadership has fostered an atmosphere of team building, collaboration, and learning. I came into the GW Master of Publishing program a year ago with no experience. It has been great to get some practical experience in the field while being encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

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

Of course I want to be an ethical person in both my personal and professional lives, but sometimes a person doesn't know what they don't know. I would fall into the category of having the desire but not having encountered many ethical issues outside of my own little bubble. The study of ethical practices in publishing helps me be a more rounded individual in all areas.

Do you feel that the classes you have taken so far have discussed ethics enough?

It's hard to define what qualifies as "enough." However, after a year in the program, there hasn't been a class that hasn't touched on the ethical side of the subject matter. There is always discussion about how to be ethical and how to approach each area through the lens of ethical behavior.

What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

I would like to see the journal lean into curating the conversation around ethics in publishing. I would like to see the staff brainstorm areas based on current issues and then request material on those topics. The general call for papers is great and can lead to vital contributions to the conversation, but we really could be on the cutting edge of this area with some planning and forethought.

Student Interview: Cady Hockman

Bio:

My name is Cady Hockman (they/them). I am a first-year student in GW's publishing program and a member of *GWJEP*'s Editorial Committee. I currently work in financial services and data acquisition, and am eager to break into the publishing industry. In my free time, I like to read about the end of the world, dance with my partner, and explore ponds with my dog. I am passionate about using my skills to uplift marginalized voices and expand open source access to literature and research.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

To me, ethics in publishing means evaluating stories on the basis of content and their impacts on the world. By this I mean that publishers have a responsibility to assess context, influence, and impact for the stories that are told, and consider what silences the stories that aren't. Ethics in publishing is actionable, and it is achieved through a never-ending dialogue on creativity, power, and public interest.

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

I am interested in generative AI and the regulations that corporations and governing bodies are formulating around the use of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence is a frequent sidebar in my classes. It can be challenging to find information for AI use policies on the websites of many large corporations and platforms, because in some instances those decisions remain internal or have yet to be codified. Fanfiction is also a topic of growing interest for me. The gift economy of fanfiction was one of my first introductions to open source

media, and I emerged from childhood with the wholly incorrect assumption that fanfiction was a utopian landscape largely untouched by greed or conflict. However, the prevalence of unauthorized fan-bindings on online shops and the infringement foundational to the form complicate my adolescent impressions of the genre, and make fanfiction an increasingly interesting topic in publishing.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

Working on the journal's editorial committee gives me the opportunity to try on many different hats throughout a publication cycle. In addition to evaluating and editing article submissions, our committee engages directly with authors and peer reviewers to mold articles into a published state. When we aren't working on articles, we are researching and formulating guidelines for submissions or resources for publishing scholars. Serving as a member of the *Journal of Ethics in Publishing* is a deeply rewarding and dynamic experience.

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

Ethics in publishing has made transparency and actionability my major focus when drafting company resources and correspondences. In my academic life, it has led me to act with more intentionality than I would have thought myself capable of, specifically while working to develop a business plan for a niche publishing startup. As a newcomer to an industry dominated by giants, the task of building a sustainable small business model while adhering to all of my own expectations of ethical behavior can seem unattainable. Yet, the concerns of ethics in publishing are the issues that I wish to grapple with and those I am responsible for upholding as a publishing professional.

Do you feel that the classes you have taken so far have discussed ethics enough?

Ethics is the undercurrent of every publishing course I have taken at GW thus far. Because my professors are industry leaders, they are concerned not only with our effectiveness as members of the publishing world, but also with shaping us into conscientious professionals. I have found my professors and course material reinforce a fundamental commitment to ethical practices in publishing. Like most topics, what is ethical in publishing is neither static nor always conspicuous. My classes give myself and my peers the time and space to engage in dialogues about the nature and practice of these changing topics.

I am grateful for a place to have these conversations because, as I transition into professional publishing, I understand that I will not be present to discuss the application of ethics in publishing at every juncture in which it applies to myself and my work. I value the opportunity to research context and formulate opinions on these issues in advance of taking on a publishing job and being required to follow pre-existing guidelines.

What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

I would like to see a review column that can help professionals discover trade resources by offering critiques on publishing books and articles.

Student Interview: Ashley Nix

Bio:

Ashley is a book enthusiast who currently calls Indiana home. A former teacher turned publishing pursuant, Ashley loves all things that incorporate the world of literature. Her favorite books are usually fantasy, with her most recent 5-star rating given to *When the Moon Hatched* by Sarah A. Parker. Outside of school and reading, Ashley enjoys traveling as much as she can and getting into the open outdoors. She is a loving pet mom to her Bernese Mountain Dog named Rue and Balinese Cat named Mia. While attending GWU, Ashley works as a Proposal Coordinator, creating and editing proposals for government agencies. Within her coursework, Ashley is always seeking to relate projects and assignments to her passion for children's literature and education. If you're ever looking for Ashley, you can probably find her at the nearest hiking trail with her dog or local coffee shop trying a new brew.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

Ethics in Publishing is something that I've really learned so much more about since attending GWU. Being ethical about something pertains to the moral principles of it, and I think in the world of publishing there is so much out there that is questioned. Publishing should be a place where diverse ideas and topics are shared and discussed. When looking at multiple publishing topics, the ethical questions raised usually surround truthful and accurate findings, access to information, DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion), and the ever-growing world of technology. I believe talking about and sharing information regarding ethics in publishing will lead to a more valuable community.

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

The one that hits closest to home is banned books. Even though I'm not an educator anymore, I am still incredibly passionate about the world of education and how education is run in the U.S. It deeply saddens me that it feels like we're heading backward by banning books within schools. The right to access books is incredibly important to have in schools, and I don't believe that the government should decide what we can and can't read. I am proud of the initiative that a lot of companies have taken to promote their books that are considered to be banned and increase accessibility to them. I am also passionate about DEI within publishing and promoting more diverse voices to be heard. I think this is something that can always be improved upon, and I'd like to support it in any way I can. The issues surrounding AI are constantly being talked about, so I think that might be an oversaturated topic to discuss, even though it is important.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

I have really enjoyed working with the journal. The best part for me has been working with the most supportive team and collaborating with them. My role has been focused on creating graphics for social media, and I've had a great time being able to utilize my creativity and apply it to the journal. It's really exciting to be able to see something you've done posted on a professional social media account. I think it could also be fun to learn about the other sides of the journal so that I can be informed about the different aspects of what it takes to run a journal. I've appreciated this opportunity a lot and truly find it to be a positive community.

Within the context of marketing for an ethics-focused journal, how do you balance promotional strategies and maintain the integrity and ethical standards the journal upholds?

Because *GWJEP* is a journal about ethics, it's important that we uphold the integrity of the journal by sharing and discussing hot topics within the publishing world. We are able to promote our authors, their ideas, and articles by creating graphics dedicated to sharing who they are, as well as pulling quotes from their articles to highlight their specific ethical topic in the journal. Outside of the journal's articles, the marketing team keeps track of current

publishing topics by following Google Alerts. If there is anything specific that relates to the journal's ethical interests, we are able to share that with the community. I think that talking about ethical publishing topics outside of what the journal publishes is important in growing and maintaining our audience.

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

This specific role has provided me with experience that shows my dedication to publishing on my resume. I've become interested in the marketing side of publishing because of what I've learned. Like most people, I was focused on editorial roles, but now I know that marketing is something that I could be really good at because of the creative thinking it requires. I love using my creativity and being part of the marketing team has increased my strength in this area. It has helped me to think outside the box and apply different strategies to my assignments. It's also helped me in the team collaboration area more as we discuss a lot of different topics and ideas together.

What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

GWJEP is still so new, and I think there are a lot of opportunities as it continues to grow. For starters, I think it could be beneficial to have one or two meetings per semester with the whole journal committee to discuss what we've been doing and share anything interesting that could be beneficial for other students to learn/know about. GWU already does a lot in helping students with career paths, but maybe the journal itself could have special career connection opportunities to learn about specific journal presses and what they may have to offer with careers. In regards to journal content, I think it would be beneficial for the journal and their social media to have video interviews with some of the authors/publishing professionals that would promote the discussion of ethics in publishing.

Student Interview: Mary K. Urquhart

Bio

Mary K. Urquhart holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English/Writing from Eastern Oregon University and is currently pursuing a Master of Professional Studies degree in Publishing at the George Washington University where she also serves on the E-Publishing committee for the *GW Journal of Ethics*. She was the managing editor for the 2022/2023 issue of Oregon East, EOU's long-running literary magazine. Previously she spent more than a decade working in the food manufacturing industry where she learned a great deal about food, business, and production. She resides in the Reno area in the great state of Nevada and dedicates her free time to her dogs and cat.

What does ethics in publishing mean to you?

The topic of ethics is an interesting one because ethical arguments can be both subjective and objective and whether an argument leans in one direction or the other is dependent on what one considers moral or amoral. Questions of morality, while often generally agreed upon in many cases, are based on ideology and how each of our different ideologies are informed and influenced by progressing discourse, life experiences, and of course, literature. Thus, my answer today might differ from my answer in twenty years, but today what ethics in publishing means to me is looking beyond the complacency of previous generations to find basic human decency.

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

I am very interested in the DEI movement in publishing. Since I started this program in August of last year, I've been really impressed by GW's efforts to

push conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion into the forefront of the publishing industry. More specifically, I recently became aware of two emerging issues: Jewish actors feeling excluded from the DEI movement in the film and television industry, and Palestinian employees feeling silenced in the publishing industry. The obvious conflict between the two issues becomes the catalyst for a conversation about equity in the DEI movement and how the publishing industry might navigate conflicts of equity within the movement.

How would you describe your experience with the journal?

I would describe my time with the journal as a positive and fulfilling experience. This is my first experience working on a journal and I've come to appreciate the amount of work and organization involved in producing each issue.

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

I'm relatively new to publishing. My educational experiences up to now have been primarily on the author side of the equation. Being a part of this degree program and the journal has exposed me to the publishing industry more than I could ever have fathomed, and part of that is learning to see the industry through the lens of ethics. I would equate it to being colorblind and suddenly being able to see colors I've never seen before. I find myself suddenly in this world where I'm thinking about the relationship between ethics and copyright law or contracts or the emergence of AI in publishing. It's really fascinating from both professional and educational perspectives.

Do you feel that the classes you have taken so far have discussed ethics enough?

I've only taken a handful of courses at this point, and I have to say that ethics have come up in nearly every class. It is a pretty consistent theme in this program so far and I expect that to continue.

What is something you would like to see the journal do in the future?

I would love to see the journal explore the ethical implications of rhetoric surrounding the Israel/Palestine conflict. With any social movement, society will tend to shift toward one extreme or another, rarely finding middle ground. We saw it during the Depp v. Heard defamation suit with the conflict between celebrity idolization and the Me-Too movement. We've also seen it in the Me-Too movement itself with the juxtaposition between the idea that women should be believed and the idea that all women are automatically telling the truth. Currently, I'm seeing similar rhetorical conflicts on the subject of the Israel/Palestine conflict, and I would love the journal to explore this rhetoric through an ethical lens from multiple points of view.

Submission Guidelines

Call for Papers

GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

Submit your article using this Call for Papers Submission form.

The George Washington University Master of Professional Studies in Publishing program solicits papers for the GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing, a new, open access journal. The *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* (*GWJEP*) welcomes articles, case studies, and conference presentations from scholars, students, and publishing, library, and scholarly communication professionals on topics including, but not limited to, diversity and inclusion, accessibility, peer review, open access, sustainability, publishing metrics, equity, and other aspects and issues of ethics in publishing. This online journal is managed by students in the GW Publishing program and overseen by Editor-in-Chief Randy Townsend and an editorial board of publishing professionals.

We welcome papers professionals, scholars, faculty, and students, from the fields of publishing, library scholarly communication, journalism, and related fields, on topic areas such as:

- Ways to ensure publishing is inclusive in all its dimensions
- Making sure diverse voices are part of the conversation about inclusion, equity, and accessibility
- Work to ensure peer review, authorship, editing, publications metrics, etc., are equitable and free of bias
- Can equitable, inclusive, and accessible publishing become a reality instead of a goal?
- Institutional efforts to increase diversity, for example, within the Association of University Press (AUPresses), Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP), and other publishing institutions

- Financial equity and sustainability, including institutional support, and access to research and publications, as ethical issues
- Accessibility as an ethical issue
- How publishers can ensure publications are more accessible

Alumni of and current students in the GW Master of Professional Studies in Publishing program are invited to present on their Ethics in Publishing Capstone projects, including both "Making the World Better" projects and Case Studies.

Scholarly articles, case studies, and "Making the World Better" projects are subject to peer review, unless invited. Peer review will comprise double-blind peer review (wherein neither the author nor the reviewer know each other's identity), although the journal may also experiment, with authors' permission, in alternative forms of peer review. Papers from underrepresented voices are especially encouraged.

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 will be published utilizing 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, though a grant from the Mellon Foundation.

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 ways of contributing to communities, including local, regional, or global publishing communities or other communities on aspects of publishing, literacy, and so on.
- Invited editorials and commentaries
- 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.

Submit your article using this Call for Papers Submission form.

Peer Review Guidelines

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

Review Questions

Please provide a few sentences in each section below, as applicable. Although the review may be critical, personal attacks are never appropriate in peer review. Instead, focus on opportunities to improve the submission.

In the final section, provide your recommendation to the editor. Note if any subject matter within the article is outside your field of knowledge, or if there is anything else that you want to disclose to the editor.

Overall

- 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?
- Is there a consistent use of style (Chicago, APA, MLA, etc.) throughout?

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?

Recommendations for publication (select one):

1. **Accept, no revisions needed:** Paper is well written and a significant contribution to the literature. No improvement needed.
2. **Revise, minor revisions requested**: Well-written, well-organized with some minor edits to arguments, research, or analysis. Additional including formatting, grammar, or style suggestions required.
3. **Revise, major revisions requested**: Paper is promising, but requires multiple major revisions, such as more research, depth, or analysis. Several sections require rewriting in order to improve clarity, flow, or arguments. Revised manuscript may undergo peer review again.
4. **Reject for publication**: Manuscript seems unable to conform

to acceptable standards even after revision, or is not within the journal's scope.

Optional section:

Please use the area below for any comments to the editor that *will not be provided* to the author.

Instructions for Authors

The GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing

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.

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

Heading Level 1

Heading Level 2

Heading Level 3

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* or the GW Ethics in Publishing Conference, please contact John W. Warren, Director and Associate Professor of the Master of Professional Studies program, at jww@gwu.edu.