

## *Knowledge, Skills, and Habits of Mind: The ASU Scholarly Publishing Program*

Publishers looking for a science editor must often choose between a scientist who will need to learn about publishing and an editor who will need to learn about science. One rarely finds both kinds of knowledge and skills in a single applicant. At Arizona State University (ASU), the Scholarly Publishing Program provides publishing education to graduate students in all disciplines, including the sciences. This combination allows students to develop editing skills while pursuing degrees in traditional academic disciplines. The science students usually go into science publishing, and so do some of the humanities students. Having students from a wide range of disciplines in the same classroom broadens everyone's interests and opportunities. Perhaps most important, it creates habits of thinking that allow students to adapt to different publishing environments.

### **Knowledge and Skills**

Each year, 10 to 12 students enter the program. All must either have a graduate degree in hand or be enrolled in a graduate program at ASU. In addition to their degree requirements, they must complete 28 hours of coursework that covers editing skills, the economics of publishing, design, legal issues, research methods, and marketing and a variety of electives. One hour makes up a short course taught by a practicing publisher who spends a week on campus. Six hours make up an 8-week internship with a publishing house. The most useful electives for students interested in science publishing are taught in the Biology Department, on popular science writing and scientific data presentation.

The editing classes are practical. Students begin with exercises designed to teach specific skills but quickly move on to editing real manuscripts. In addition to grammar, usage, and style, the classes emphasize critical reading, setting priorities, and communicating clearly and tactfully with authors. Students also learn to read design specifications, communicate editorial information to designers, and write summaries of books for the marketing department.

Our students are a joy to teach. The program is work that students voluntarily take on in addition to their already-demanding graduate classes, so they are highly motivated. They are also bright: they have been admitted to graduate programs, and the Scholarly Publishing Program itself is highly selective. We carefully review applicants' test scores, undergraduate records, recommendation letters, and writing samples. In the classes, we try to create the kind of environment that one finds in a good editorial office: curiosity and cooperation are encouraged, and it is safe—indeed, praiseworthy—to admit that you don't know something. Learning where and how to look things up efficiently is an important component. As students explain their approaches to editing a text, they quickly learn that editorial problems often have many solutions and that editors need to be good decision-makers.

### **Disciplinary Diversity**

A class that includes students in history, literature, business, biology, art, and anthropology presents substantial challenges. Students bring with them different learning styles, research skills, biases, interests, and insecurities. Literature students may grow faint when asked to edit tables, and biologists may feel uneasy with anything but the most straightforward prose. But once students are able to express their discomfort and are offered ways to conquer it, the benefits of this diversity are enormous. By the end of the year, all the students are comfortable and competent far beyond their disciplinary boundaries. Many of them say that the publishing classes help them maintain an interest in the wider world of the mind at a time when their other graduate studies force them to focus very narrowly on their own research.

Electives, too, offer opportunities to broaden one's interests. These courses range from papermaking and fine printing to Web design, from young-adult literature to copyright law, from the history of print culture to creative writing. Some of these teach clearly relevant information; others introduce ideas about publishing from new

perspectives; still others give students a sense of the tradition and social role of the publishing enterprise. Students gain confidence by venturing outside their own disciplines and succeeding in new territories.

The internship, which is taken after core courses are completed, provides real-world experience and an opportunity to learn how a publishing house works. Interns can see how books and journals are produced, learn how editing fits into other activities, and try on different publishing hats. Some students spend a week or two in each department; some work on a special project; others spend their time in a single department. Over the last 20 years, students have interned with university presses, for-profit scholarly publishers, textbook houses, trade houses, and journals. Some publishers have sponsored interns nearly every year, and all have been happy to continue their participation.

## **Beyond the Classroom**

Although the major beneficiaries of the Scholarly Publishing Program are the students admitted to the program, the program's presence creates benefits for other students and for faculty members. The introductory class is open to all graduate students, and it provides them with a good understanding of the procedures, economics, and ethical concerns of scholarly publishing that will make them better academic authors. I speak regularly to junior faculty and graduate students and occasionally to undergraduate classes about publishing. Most audiences want to know how to get their work published, but I always include material about economics and ethics as well. Classroom presentations for undergraduates usually focus on ethical issues.

Equally important, our students are valuable to the several dozen journals that are edited on our campus, as well as to the units that publish books, the university catalog, and other publications. They are much in demand for graduate assistantships and for freelance work. This additional experience helps them qualify for higher-level jobs when they graduate.

## **Habits of Mind**

The skills an editor needs are easy to enumerate and relatively easy to teach. But to excel, our students need more than skills and disciplinary knowledge. They need to develop ways of thinking and working that serve both scholars and editors well over a lifelong career. These habits of mind include curiosity, attention to detail, intellectual integrity, sufficient confidence to work with little recognition, and the ability to communicate tactfully and persuasively. I have yet to find a textbook or curriculum that teaches these habits. But students can learn all of them if they are regularly practiced and modeled in the classroom. Curiosity can be encouraged by generosity toward the errors that occur when students take intellectual risks and by willingness to depart from the syllabus when an interesting question comes up. Attention to detail can be inculcated by making students do assignments over and over until they get them right. Intellectual integrity should be taught in every university class and exhibited by every faculty member. Demonstrating the value of good editorial work allows students to take pride in what they do, even if it is done anonymously. And a classroom in which tact and persuasiveness are practiced and rewarded, and less diplomatic forms of communication are discouraged, creates the habit of civil, effective speech and writing.

When I began teaching in 1980, I thought that semicolons would be the biggest challenge. Semicolons take 10 minutes. Learning to be a good editor takes years. Our goal is to get our students off to a good start, to remind them that there is always more to learn, and to develop the habits that will keep them thinking.

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