

Getting Your Work Published **An AFS Professional Development Lunchtime Roundtable**

Roundtable Leaders:

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This document reports on a professional development workshop for graduate students and new professionals in the field of folklore studies sponsored by the AFS at its 2005 annual meeting in Atlanta. The Folk and Traditional Arts Program of the National Endowment for the Arts provided funding for this workshop.

Choose Your Medium

- There are economic considerations to keep in mind when deciding in what form you would like to publish your work. A book has to work to gain its audience. However, a journal article does not have to pay its own way.
- You can get away with a great deal more in an article (i.e., may have technical details), but the down side is that there is less room in which to work.
- Publishing your work in a journal is a good way to indicate to the scholarly community that you are working on a certain topic. It is also a way to find out if someone else is doing similar work.

Determine Where to Publish Your Work

- It makes the most sense to come up with a publishing plan once you have finished your fieldwork. Ask yourself, “What kinds of questions do I want to answer? What kind of book have I not found but would like to see in the library?”
- Talk to publishers. Scholarly publishers tend to help one another – they stick together in the face of commercial publishing. They may tell you that your work is not appropriate for their press but refer you to a press that is more suitable.
- Use common sense. Talk to your colleagues to gain their input and determine where you would be comfortable.

Keep Mechanics in Mind

- When you send work to editors be certain that you follow the submission guidelines! Most publishers and journals provide preparation and submission guidelines on their Web site. These guidelines should be read before doing anything. However, a publisher may work with you if the circumstances are unique.
- Read the journal to which you intend to submit your work and get a feel for the style, tone, article length, and the average number of citations for each article.
- Examine the organization of your article. You must have a clearly stated thesis that is situated with scholarship of the field.

Keep Your Work Relevant

- Scholarly journals, such as the *Journal of American Folklore*, are interested in publishing articles that conceptualize the field of folklore in new ways. Does the article engage the field as well as a broader readership? This is what makes an article more relevant.
- Don't replicate previous ideas. Find and develop your own voice. Ask yourself, "What are the big questions? What should folklorists be doing?" Try to make your work something that pushes the field forward and questions the basic assumptions the discipline.
- Synthesize scholarship and show how your work fits into the intellectual context. In other words, tell readers what is going on in the field and how your work fits into it. It is important for scholars to show that they are engaged in a dialogue with scholarship and that their work contributes to this dialogue.
- Make your work speak to broader issues. Consider how someone not in the field of folklore might be able to use your work.
- All work does not need to be theoretical; if your article focuses primarily on the interpretation of a particular culture, genre, or period, you need to make your interpretations rich enough to suggest how they can speak to the larger issues.
- Aim to examine the things you care about and that are missing from scholarship.

The Difference Between a Dissertation and A Book

- It is important to remember that dissertations are *not* the same as a book. A dissertation is the last work of a student while a book is the first work of a scholar. While a dissertation is ultimately written for several people on a committee, a book is written for a larger audience.
- Some universities require instructors who are going for tenure to show how their first book is different from their dissertation. You will save yourself some grief by keeping a record of all the ways that the two are different, including lists of new citations and notes, substantially revised chapters or sections, reorganization of sections or chapters, and new framing work that makes old passages speak to new issues.
- In most cases a revised dissertation will be your first book. However, if your dissertation is not topical, do not waste your time revising it; instead, you should start on a new and topical subject for your first book.

Publishing and Tenure

- The number of books a school requires scholars to publish varies. In general, it is good to have a contract for your first book in place for your third-year review and to have a clear idea of what your second project will focus on
- One way make a case for the importance of your work to your department head and dean is to provide info on the journal(s) in which you have published. Journal acceptance rates are often published and these numbers can be quite helpful to show administrators the value of your work. Do not feel discouraged if you cannot find these numbers for your particular journal(s). This is only one way to argue for the importance of your research. [Ask a reference librarian where to find journal statistics.]
- It may be helpful to list the names of leaders in your field who have published in the same journal.

Reaching a Broad Audience

- A successful book must appeal beyond a single field. There are certainly not enough folklorists in the world to support publication.
- Because the funds for publication are not what they used to be, it is imperative that writers appeal to a broad readership. Beware of jargon! People in economics, feminist studies, etc, do not use words such as *folkloristic*.

Photos

- Some books do not require illustration, while others need a lot. The decision to include photos is made on an individual basis.
- The standard requirement for photos is that they be at least 300 dpi and the TIFF file format. The JPEG format is compressed and will not be of the quality required by publishers.

How much of a manuscript may you publish in parts and still have a viable final work?

- The less published, the more original the final work will appear. A publisher is likely to ask, “Why should we duplicate what has already been published.”
- When looking to pull an article from a larger work, look for the part of your work that is too detailed and not likely to make it into the published book. This way you may still publish an article on your topic, but not harm your chances of publishing in book form. Also, in your book notes you may direct people to the previously published article.

Proposal Letters

- It is perfectly acceptable to send letters of inquiry to ten or so different publishers. However, when sending your manuscript, send it to only one publisher at a time.
- If you do send your manuscript to more than one publisher, it is a good idea to let them know. Keep in mind, though, that some publishers will disapprove.
- Most publishers will not look at un-revised dissertations. There are exceptions, but they are rare. The cover letter that accompanies your manuscript should state specifically how the work will be changed (i.e., will omit the jargon, do new field work in a certain location, etc.)

What editors consider when examining a book manuscript

- Does the writer cut to the chase? Length is critical. A book must be *lean and mean* (approximately 70, 000 words or 80,000 including notes and quotes). While it can be difficult to write this way, it must be done if you want to publish your work.
- Is it readable aloud?
- Would the topic warrant a New York Times headline?
- If you could only recommend ten books to a library, would this be one of them?
- Keep in mind that it is not possible for a publisher to ignore either the financial considerations or the scholarly contribution of a work. Each plays an equally important role in determining whether or not a manuscript is viable.

Readers' Reports

- Take readers' reports on your work seriously! You need not do everything that the reader's suggest, but you should show that you have engaged with their criticisms in the response to the reader's reports that you send to the journal or publisher. If a reader suggests a major revision that you feel is not appropriate, you should discuss that point in your response letter and explain why you have chosen not to make the specified revision.
- Reader comments can sometimes be harsh, and it is important, and it is important to have good sense of self and a clear idea of what it is you are trying to accomplish in your work. Also, you may find a reader who is trying to get you to write what they would write, so you must have a clear sense of purpose.

Manuscript review timeline

- The time it takes to make revisions is really out of the press's hands. The time required depends on how the readers and the writer work.
- Once a final manuscript (including images, captions, notes, interviews, permissions, etc.) is submitted to a press, it takes an average of a year before the book is available.
- When the University of Illinois (U of I) receives a manuscript, they will ask readers to review it for a nominal fee. They generally ask for a 4 – 6 week turnaround. If the readers have suggestions, these are sent to the writer who may adjust as s/he feels it is needed. The press *does* ask for a response from the writer concerning why they do or do not take reader suggestions.
- Most presses will get cost estimates for a proposed book. This includes the cost of such things as paper, colored ink, copying, pencils, etc. These factors are considered and altered as needed to see if it will be possible to publish the work. The writer may be required to shorten the manuscript in order to get it published.
- It is perfectly acceptable for a writer to contact a publisher and ask where they are in the review process. If you have concerns regarding the amount of time it is taking a press to review your work, you may ask to have the manuscript returned.

Contracts

- Some publishers may send you an advance contract. At the U of I Press, no contract is valid, whether signed or not, until it is examined and approved by the board.
- Sometimes the writer will not receive royalties. However, the real benefit for academics comes in the form of promotions and tenure, not royalties.

Keep in Mind

You must be bold and rigorous in the pursuit of publication!