On Publishing a Campus Literary Journal

by Jim Coby & Saul Lemerond

ABSTRACT

In this article, we discuss our experiences as the facilitators of the creative journals at each of our Indiana institutions of higher learning, Hanover College, a private liberal arts college, and Indiana University Kokomo, a public regional campus. Student-run undergraduate journals provide outlets for creative expression for students across a range of disciplines as well as provide a host of practical learning opportunities, yet relatively little information exists for faculty helming these projects. Our goal is to provide readers with insights from our experiences running our respective journals.

INTRODUCTION

In his 1943 poem, "Madam's Calling Cards," Langston Hughes writes of his titular character approaching a shopkeeper to discuss printing services. Madam explains, "I told the man/ I wasn't no mint,/ But I hankered to see/ My name in print" (164). For Madam, validation exists in seeing one's name on the printed page by signaling to the world the author's significance. Such a belief animated Madam's desire for calling cards, and such a desire animates many of creative writers' ambitions. True for seasoned writers and novices alike, having a forum for publication and seeing a work through to the point of publication can be extremely gratifying. We're fortunate that the institutions at which we work—Hanover College and Indiana University Kokomo—each support their students this opportunity by publishing annual journals of creative and academic works.

At each of these universities, we serve as the faculty advisors to the journals. Jim, at Indiana University Kokomo, is Editor-in-Chief of *Field: A Journal of Arts and Sciences*, while Saul, at Hanover College, facilitates *Kennings*. Our relationship dates to graduate school, and in our discussions about the trajectories of our lives and careers, we discovered that each of us had been given the reins of our school's respective literary journals.With that came significant freedom and

pressure, as we quickly discovered that there is little in the way of practicable, actionable advice or discussion online or in print about what the process of running an undergraduate literary journal entails. While there are countless teaching guides, pedagogical journals, and workshops that concern themselves with classroom instructional ideas, few are available for our aims. A notable exception to this statement is Audrey Colombe's *Creating an Undergraduate Literary Journal: A Production Guide for Students and Faculty*; this guide, however, has only been available since February of 2022, which signals to us how relatively little has been written about this subject, in addition to how substantial the potential readership for information is.

Our ambitions in this essay are not quite as capacious as Colombe's. Instead, we hope that any faculty member potentially considering taking the lead of their campus's journal finds some helpful and relatable advice here in our recountings of our experiences. Additionally, we hope students who may be considering serving on a creative writing journal board find points of interest in our piece. This essay begins with brief accounts of our experiences over the past few years. Before sharing these accounts, however, we've combined our knowledge to devise a brief set of what we believe to be best practices concerning student expectations and responsibilities. We then conclude our essay with a brief discussion about where we foresee literary journals—individually, and as a large publishing unit - heading in the near future.

Lessons Learned and Best Practices

What sits below is by no means exhaustive. Certainly anyone desiring to take on the brunt of work starting and maintaining a literary journal should seek supplemental advice from additional print sources and from fellow faculty who have also participated in these sorts of activities. Nonetheless, we believe that what we've discovered in our experiences will provide valuable insight for those embarking on similar missions.

- Reach out to the community and make your journal not just an integral part of the campus ecosystem, but the greater social landscape or your service area.
- Whenever possible, maintain some degree of institutional knowledge. At best, have students serve in Review Board roles

one year and then leadership roles the next. At worst, keep detailed notes from previous year's meetings and make sure that interns have access to these.

- Have students take the lead on both the design and theme of the journal. Within reason, don't second-guess their artistic abilities.
- Foster cross-campus and interdisciplinary dialogues with your journal. Whenever possible, populate Review Boards with students from disciplines outside of the humanities and fine arts.
- Prepare for failures. Putting together a journal is a difficult process, and things willw go wrong along the way. And that's okay. Focus on the successes and a quality final product.
- Reach out to other departments and foster interdepartmental collaboration.
- Explore other, especially digital, avenues of publication, (e.g. podcasts, broadcasts, and in person performances).

Jim's Narrative

I began my career teaching American literature at Indiana University Kokomo during the spring semester of 2020. Talk about timing, huh? Everything began auspiciously enough: the students were clever and responsive, resources—both for faculty and students—abounded, and my supervisors encouraged me in my teaching and research pursuits. What was new, however, was that I would be assuming the role of Editor-in-Chief, and running the attendant internship, for our campus's literary journal, *Field: A Journal of Arts and Sciences*, beginning in the fall semester. I was attending weekly meetings with the journal's interim Editor-in-Chief and his remarkable group of interns, and then came the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. I won't belabor the point. But, suffice it to say, my window of observation was unfortunately brief, and I went into the fall 2020 semester somewhat flying by the seat of my pants. My objective over the rest of my narrative is to highlight a few of the lessons that I learned in an effort to both prepare other faculty members who might one day assume similar roles, and also to highlight the intense affective labor in which faculty members running internships participate.

STRUCTURE OF THE INTERNSHIP

Before exploring the outcomes of the internship, it's likely useful to take a step back and understand broadly how I structure the course. On the Executive Board are a Managing Editor who is responsible for outreach and event planning (in addition to standard responsibilities such as soliciting submissions, serving on Review Boards, and attending weekly meetings), the Associate & Copy Editor, who takes the helm proofing submissions and responding to contributors, and the Art Director, who chooses the typeface for and designs the general structure of the journal. Beyond this, I have students serving in the positions of Review Board Team Leaders. Review Board Teams Leaders cover the following areas: Visual Art and Media, Prose, Poetry and Music, Research and Film.[1] Each of the Review Board Team Leaders holds the responsibility of assembling a Review Board consisting of at least three total members, designating where and how often their Review Boards will meet, and designing a rubric by which their Members will assess their submissions. These Members tend to be our most diverse group, as they are recruited primarily through word-of-mouth and campus interactions. As a result, we have a wide array of disciplines and majors represented, which better allows us to examine the quality and rigor of research from outside of our own specific disciplines.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the first things I learned over the course of running this internship is just how enterprising and ambitious the participating students are. Certainly, the students enrolled in this internship have been the cream of the crop, and yet I initially was reluctant to cede much of my authority to them. For example, early in our semesters we create several calls for submissions for our campus body. As Peter Elliott rightly suggests, the way to make a campus literary journal as inclusive and well-rounded as possible is to "advertise to and invite the entire study body for submissions" (39). The calls include posters that will be hung throughout campus, a lengthy, detailed CFP that will be distributed through email, and a short, punchy call that will

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1 One of my major goals with *Field* was to widen the scope of potential submissions. In addition to visual art, poetry, prose, and research, we also accept comix, videography, music, podcast, and spoken word submissions. We house these contributions on our YouTube channel and provide a QR code in our printed volume to help interest parties access this material.

appear on social media. Given that we needed three sets of copy, I expected that my interns would find composing different versions of the same basic call several times over to be tedious and unnecessary. The truth of the matter could not have been more different. Far from finding the assignment tedious, they relished the experience. Sure, there were some reservations and nerves ("You mean my writing will be read by the *entire* student body?"), but those quickly fell to the side as my interns focused on the most efficient and compelling ways of structuring their calls.

Furthermore, I found that students actively desired to get absolutely everything they could out of the internship. Certain responsibilities—soliciting submissions, proofreading accepted materials, collating and arranging the journal in an aesthetically pleasing format—came with the territory, and I anticipated students being excited to take part in these. What surprised me was their interest in the minutiae of the project. For example, I share budget information with my students, but I did not suspect students would take such a vested interest in ensuring that we were receiving the best printing rates in the state. Similar surprises took place throughout the semester. There's a Student Life Expo? Let's greet students! We need to distribute copies of older volumes? Let's get involved with Kokomo's First Friday events! We've just released our latest volume? Let's plan a party! This is all to say that while it would be unwise to remain totally "hands-off" during the semester, you should be willing to provide students with as much responsibility as they desire to take on.

On Assessment

Despite how it might appear to outside observers given the lack of "traditional" class elements (for example, my interns and I don't utilize classrooms, preferring coffee shops, campus lounges, and my office as our meeting spaces), this internship is, indeed, a class. It's a rigorous one, too. Still, given that the objectives of this internship so differ from what I would generally aim toward in one of my composition or literature courses, I found myself struggling initially with how to treat grades in this class. To that end, I've been thinking quite a bit lately about "ungrading."

Traditional methods of grading—assigning numerical or letter grades—have fallen out of vogue in the past several years, as "they derive from the notion that there is a single, fixed amount of intelligence—fixed mindset—and that every individual can be arrayed against all

others in an objective distribution" (Blum 7). Inherent to such ideas are "racist, classist, sexist, ableist, and more" assumptions (Blum 7). Indeed, it's been my experience that attempting to judge the work of, for example, one of my interns who regularly leads critiquing sessions with their Poetry Review Board team members against, say, an intern who's responsible for graphic design and page formatting to be frustrating at best, and maddening at worst. Although each student is an intern in the same class, their micro objectives diverge in such ways as to be impossible to compare. Would it be fair for me to assign, I don't know, a 96/100 to the graphic design student because I don't like a chosen typeface, even though they completed their work? Or should I award a B to the Poetry Review Board team leader because they went off-script in one of their meetings? That seems unfair to me.

Jesse Stommel writes that "Grades are not a good incentive. They incentivize the wrong stuff: the product over the process, what the teacher thinks over what the student thinks" (28). I agree with Stommel. And so I make it clear to my interns early in our time together that, while I will, per University policy, be awarding them a grade at the conclusion of our time together, those grades should not be their focus. The focus should be on the product. Solicit submissions. Spread the word about the journal. Review and assess to find the strongest works. Reach out to printers to determine costs. Plan events to share our journal with the community. These are our objectives; these are the goals to work toward. If they're completed, if at the end of our academic year we have a print journal that we can hold in our hands, flip through, and, most significantly, be proud of, then everyone is earning a high grade.

Of course, even if students don't *like* grades, they generally *want* grades; they're accustomed to having milestones throughout the course to let them know whether or not they're succeeding. I certainly don't want to create undue stress on what is surely one of the most stressed-out generations of college students.[2] And so, I make it clear early in the semester that there will be checkpoints along the way to help students assess their progress. For example, each week I ask that students submit a roughly 250 word document in which they detail their work performed during the week. Additionally, at the end of

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2 The American College Health Association found in 2021 that neraly half of college students reported experiencing "moderate or severe psychological stress" and over half harboring feelings of loneliness: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/college-students-stress-levels-are-bubbling-over-heres-why-and-how-schools-can-help#:~:text=Judy%2C%20a%20study%20this%20year,in%20four%20had%20considered%20suicide.

the academic year I ask that students write a letter to their successor describing the various successes and struggles we encountered and highlighting the "things they wish they would have known" going into the internship. For each of these assignments I assign students a grade of complete or incomplete. I suppose I could grade them for their formatting and that I could scrutinize their grammar, but if these students are being trusted with the production of a literary journal, shouldn't they be trusted to author their own weekly reports? Still, the little green checkmark in our Canvas gradebook serves as a signal to students that they're completing the work satisfactorily, and that we're actively moving toward a product about which we can all be proud.

SAUL'S NARRATIVE

DEVELOPING A PRACTICUM

Part of my responsibilities at Hanover College, a small liberal arts college located in Southern Indiana, is as the faculty advisor to our student-run literary magazine, *Kennings Literary and Arts Journal*. Hanover holds the distinction of being the oldest college in the state, and its literary magazine has been published since 1941. When I arrived in 2018, its production process was as follows: Each year the students on staff would solicit submissions from themselves and their friends. They would read the submissions and then vote yes or no on them. The work would be collected in a Word .doc file, printed, stapled, and distributed to *Kennings* staff and the staff's close friends. This is the way it has been done for the past eighty or so years, and there is nothing wrong with this. That the students at Hanover had been coming together to produce a magazine of what is mostly their work and the work of their close friends is not only common, but a time-honored tradition in the history of zine publishing at colleges and in plenty of communities outside of academia. However, making a zine with friends and creating a literary journal are two vastly different projects requiring vastly different sorts of labor, which leads to vastly different learning outcomes. Editing a literary journal is a multimodal learning activity. The value of such activities is something I've written about in the past in *The Journal of Creative Writing Studies*. As such, I decided to add a practicum in publishing to the curriculum and go about the business of teaching Hanover's students how to professionalize its literary journal.

When preparing to design the curriculum for the practicum, I sat down and made a list of everything necessary to produce a semi-professional undergraduate literary journal. We needed a call for submissions, a website, money to print the journal, someone qualified to be layout editor. We needed a system for reviewing large numbers of submissions, and we needed a way to distribute as many journals to as many people as possible. It should be noted that all of these issues outlined and dilated upon in Audrey Colombe's *Creating an Undergraduate Literary Journal.* The only text I was able to find that covered the subject directly. It is one of two texts I ended up using as course texts for the course, something I'll speak to more later.

Securing a Budget

The first and biggest issue was funding. Print journals cost money, and my department did not have the resources to shoulder this cost. Naturally, I followed a route laid out when I was an undergrad in a similar course. This is to say, it is very common for colleges and universities to have a common pool of money to fund campus clubs. At Hanover, where I currently work, this is called the Student Activities Budget Committee (SBAC). These are the same sort of funds that make the student newspaper possible or allow for the campus improv troupe to go to their regional improvisational comedy festival. It's also where *Kennings* had been getting its print budget for the past seventy years. I asked the Editor-in-Chief of *Kennings* to go to a budget meeting and ask for as much money as the committee would give them, and we were granted a large enough budget for a three hundred issue print run.

Design and Layout (Partnership and Collaboration)

My next issue was to find someone to collaborate with who could help professionalize the design of the journal. There are two basic options when considering design work: you can outsource the design work, or you can do it in house (Colombe 103-105). I scheduled a meeting with the head of the graphic design department, and explained what it was that I was trying to accomplish. I brought a wide variety of literary journals to show him as examples. I asked if there was any way one or more of his design students could work with my students to design the journal. It turns out that this professor is always actively looking for practical projects for his upper-level design

students, projects that his students can then put into their portfolios when they get out onto the job market.

I can say in hindsight that this worked out incredibly well. The design professor was and continues to be excited about the journal. The design students visited our class and vice-versa. They worked closely with us, consistently sending us concept work and proofs to approve or critique. We provided them with printing parameters, ideas, and feedback for visual themes content. It went so well that we plan to continue the partnership for the foreseeable future. It is the sort of dynamic collaboration between departments that I don't believe we see enough of in academia.

THE WEBSITE

Design of our website is also work we chose to do in house. The previous editor and chief made the skeleton of a website and developed a Google Forms page to link for submissions. We then linked to Doutrope.com, a popular online data aggregating website that writers and writing markets use to find each other. In the future, when we are more established, we plan to link to *Poets and Writers* as well as to NewPages.com. The value of a website cannot be overstated. Both practically as well as pedagogically. Writers will often decide whether or not to submit to a journal based on what they learn from a website. This means websites need to appear professional and updated. For one of the major assignments in my course, I asked my students to critique a professional journal's website and then come up with ideas for how we might improve our own website. The number of ideas generated by this assignment will probably keep our web editors busy for years to come.

I should point out that one of the major reasons for posting our journal on websites that provide links to writing markets like Doutrope.com or New Pages.com is that it opens submissions to a broader writing community, and this is important for several reasons (not least of which is that it provides students with a good deal more submissions to review). I believe it is important that students not just review the work of their friends, which is fraught with the sort of favoritism that is very much at odds with developing one's own sense of aesthetics. In past years, the staff of *Kennings* would average somewhere around twenty poetry submissions and five or six fiction submissions, and they would accept nearly all of them. This past year, the poetry staff read, ranked, and reviewed over one hundred poems, and due to space constraints, could only accept about one fifth of

them. This sort of process goes much further toward developing a strong personal sense of aesthetics. If a journal only has so much space, then the staff needs to decide, very clearly, which poems it cannot live without seeing in their journal.

The website, it turns out, is quite possibly the most important, work intensive aspect of running a journal, outside of putting the journal together itself. We would find this out later on as more and more submissions came in.

The Structure of the Course

Hanover College is a small private liberal arts college with a student population of just around a thousand students and just over eighty professors. One of the principal reasons students are attracted to Hanover is its small class sizes. A general class size for my Practicum course is eight to ten students. I assign each student a role in the journal: Editor-in-Chief, Managing Editor, Chief Copy Editor, Web Editor, Poetry Editor, Fiction Editor, Non-Fiction Editor, and Visual Arts Editor. With the possible exception of Editor-in-Chief and Web Editor, who have responsibilities throughout the semester, each of the other editors is given a specific set of responsibilities over the course of the semester congruent with their position. For instance, it is the Poetry Editor's responsibility to manage the meetings where the class reviewed and ranked poetry submissions.

There are too many submissions for all the students to review as a single class. Because of this, I also split the students into staff so that we can review all of the submissions in a reasonable amount of time. Since there were eight-ten students, I generally assign each student to two staff, and we rotate review days accordingly. In preparation for rank and review days, I ask that each student read a group of submissions ahead of time, rank them on a scale from one to five (five being: I absolutely want to see this in the journal; one being: I absolutely do not want to see this in the journal), and leave a comment on them justifying their ranking. Then each student walks into class ready to defend and/or negotiate with the other members of their staff. Selection is often the part of the process that students find the most stimulating. As Peter Ginna mentions in his book *What Editors Do*, "The power of that feeling is something that outsiders often don't understand ...[Editors] live to find books they believe in and to bring them to readers" (17).

Once selection is finished, we devote one week to copy editing as a class (there are several more rounds later with the Copy Editor,

the Managing Editor, and the Editor and Chief). Outside of this, we also have to plan distribution, which consists of a launch party and setting up distribution tables around campus. This is the nuts and bolts, or practical, portion of the course. Beyond that, the students have a series of projects and presentations also due over the course of the semester. As in the website project, I also asked them to do a similar project at the beginning of the semester where they had to critique the content of a variety of journals that I provide them, which range from professional science fiction and fantasy magazines to major academic literary journals produced by some of the nation's most prestigious MFA programs. I also bring in speakers, editors, and alumni with experience working in the industry.

The idea of the undergraduate journal is not necessarily to provide students with experience running a professional literary journal. Undergraduates are precluded from producing what one might call a professional journal simply by virtue of the fact that the entire staff come into the class with little to no experience with the process, which is to say that they are amateurs by definition. However, because they are in a practicum, the idea is to give them as much information about the professional publishing world as possible while at the same time showing them as much of the practical ins and outs of running a journal.

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