

Education for Publishing

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AT THIS POINT IN TIME, as they used to say in the Watergate hearings, education for publishing is about where journalism education was in the earlier years of this century. Whether it will go much farther depends on a number of unpredictable circumstances, and in a business where the only certainties are the uncertainties, it would be frivolous to make any solemn forecasts.

Who would have believed, for instance, when the first journalism courses were introduced at New York University (NYU) and Columbia, Missouri, about 1909 (the dates and order of precedence are not historically clear) that they would proliferate into hundreds of undergraduate and graduate programs in universities and colleges all over America and abroad as well? When Joseph Pulitzer first proposed educating journalists in 1904, and offered Columbia University the honor of pioneering, President Nicholas Murray Butler scorned him, even though it meant a \$2 million gift. He believed the academic waters would be irretrievably polluted by sanctifying journalism as a legitimate discipline.

The exchange between them became so acrimonious that it was not until 1912, a year after the publisher's death, that Butler could bring himself to accept Pulitzer's Graduate School of Journalism which has since become one of the most prestigious divisions of the university and whose graduates read like a who's who of journalism. Yet there are distinguished academics at Columbia who still regard it as an unwanted

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stepchild, and during the gloomy economic days of the 1970s, would have been willing to abandon it in the interests of economy.

Journalism education had to fight for academic recognition everywhere, first working itself free from the speech and English departments to which many programs were attached, until the invention of "mass communications" introduced the sociology of journalism to the curriculum, bringing with it grants, publication and a certain amount of respectability in the larger schools. In some places, however, it is still viewed with a tolerance bordering on contempt.

Education for journalism has had an even more difficult time in the profession itself. It was a formidable task to convince the self-taught and the untaught that a graduate of a journalism school could possibly know anything more than the lowliest cub. Only on-the-job training in the manner prescribed more than a century before was considered legitimate. The attitude persists today among some unreconstructed conservatives. But the media are now so populated by journalism graduates, from the top down, that a professional degree, while not often considered essential, is preferred more frequently than not, other things being equal.

In the now rapidly growing field of publishing education, the obstacles have been substantially the same. At the universities it has had to come in through the academic back door of the continuing education departments, the lucrative but often unjustifiably disdained stepchildren of the academy—these and the summer programs. Together they have carried most of the burden. As recently as 1958, when it was proposed to establish the first graduate degree in publishing anywhere (a step as revolutionary as Pulitzer's) at New York University, this writer, as first director, found that the only graduate faculty willing to accept the program was the School of Education, and even then the M.S. degree had to be in education, not book publishing. Furthermore, it must be called an "institute"; the notion that it might legitimately be called a "school," as Pulitzer's had been, was greeted as the kind of lunacy to be expected from people who were little better than journalists—a breed generally scorned.

There was considerable resistance in the publishing business, too, from the beginning and on the same grounds. The opposition was possibly even greater, since trade publishing jobs, at least, were so badly defined. How did one become an editor? What were publishers looking for when they hired someone? As in virtually every other aspect of the business, there were hundreds of answers and no agreement. It was, as

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Samuel Vaughan, Doubleday's great editor, defined it, an "accidental profession."

Nevertheless, unlike the newspaper publishers, it was the heads of publishing houses and their organizations which were responsible for establishing education in their field. (Pulitzer had been an exception.) Again the origins are historically misty, but it seems likely that Kenneth McCormick, perhaps the most notable of editors over a half-century, was the first to lecture on the subject at NYU, leading to the establishment there in 1943 of a course title, "The Practice of Book Publishing," a survey of publishing practices much like those courses taught today. The 1943 course was sponsored by the Book Publishers Bureau, one of the several forerunners of the present Association of American Publishers (AAP); the Book Manufacturers Institute; the American Booksellers Association; and the American Institute of Graphic Arts. Leon Shimkin, an executive of Simon and Schuster, later president of its Pocket Books division, was the moving spirit in this innovation, joined by Frederic Melcher, publisher of the trade journal, *Publishers' Weekly*; and Raymond Harwood, of Harper & Bros. (as it was then), and eventually its president. The lecturers in the course were equally distinguished names in the business.

The idea of a summer workshop originated at Radcliffe in 1947, with the establishment of its "Summer Publishing Procedures Course," first directed by Helen Everitt, but then from 1950 to 1980 by Helen (Mrs. Diggory) Venn, known affectionately to a generation of grateful students as "Doylie." This was not only the prototype for such workshops which would become the core of publishing education, but its remarkable placement record and the success of its graduates showed the way for the others.

Another approach was the fellowship program established at the University of Oklahoma in 1948, which became a training ground for editors and executives in university presses. Growth was slow, however, after these initial starts. The Graduate Institute of Book Publishing at NYU lasted only four years. Publishers helped to support it for four years, and the industry hired most of its graduates, but could not collectively muster an annual budget of \$50,000 to guarantee its continuance, and the class of 1962 was its last. Many of its graduates are today publishing executives, editors and directors of divisions.

Real proliferation began in the 1960s, and by the time Ann Heidbreder Eastman and Grant Lee surveyed "Education for Publishing" in 1976 and Peterson's Guides published *Guide to Book Publishing*

Courses in 1979,¹ both educators and publishers were surprised to discover that 200 courses were being offered in a hundred institutions, from those long established in the East to newer programs at Northern Arizona and Arkansas State universities. Since none of those outside New York and Boston had enjoyed any help or guidance from the industry, the AAP sought to remedy that neglect by establishing its "Education for Publishing Program," which laid down curriculum guidelines, published a number of helpful booklets (including an annotated bibliography of the industry), and created a library and information center, the Stephen Greene Memorial Library, at AAP headquarters in New York. Workshops were added later, along with a correspondence course, seminars, programs in specialized fields, and courses at City College in New York. Scholarships, fellowships and internships have been forthcoming from the industry itself. Unfortunately, a major budget cut at the AAP in 1984 resulted in the elimination of the publishing program. Also endangered are the credit and noncredit courses at the NYU Center for Publishing.

The summer courses remain at the core of publishing education today, attracting not only the just graduated but older career-changers as well. Besides the pioneer course at Radcliffe and the Summer Publishing Institute at NYU (now directed by Robert Carter, a former publishing and advertising executive), there is the Denver Publishing Institute, whose director is Elizabeth A. Geiser, a senior vice-president of the Gale Research Company; the Howard University Press Book Publishing Institute; the Rice Publishing Program; and others at Stanford University and several smaller institutions.

In schools of continuing education, there is the Publication Specialist Program at George Washington University; a certificate program in publishing at the University of California; a Publishing Studies Program at Hofstra University; and the graduate Oscar Dystel Fellowship in Book Publishing program, leading to the master's degree at NYU's Gallatin Division.

Further growth is limited by several factors. It is unlikely that publishing education will ever begin to equal the size and scope of journalism education, simply because publishing itself is a much smaller industry. The journalism schools and departments have long since ceased training people only for newspaper jobs. Their curricula now embrace magazine work, public relations, broadcast journalism, advertising (in a few places), and graduate training in the sociology of journalism which leads mostly to university teaching or work with polling organizations, a new industry in itself. Although publishing is

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far larger than the trade field most people conceive it to be, and its job possibilities are substantially greater than the trade editor's position so many aspirants appear to desire most, it is still small by comparison with the other media.

Another deterrent to further growth is money. Like teaching, book publishing has long been well known as a poverty pocket in the employment market. Newspapering was in the same category until unionization changed pay scales radically, but book publishers for the most part have resisted unions successfully, and it seems unlikely that publishing houses will ever be organized as thoroughly as newspapers have been. They are quite different occupations.

From the beginning, however, publishing attracted people to whom money was secondary to the satisfactions of the job. As teaching appealed to those who found a dedication in imparting knowledge, so did publishing reach out to those who found in it a constant intellectual stimulation in dealing with ideas day after day—ideas of the broadest range. But even unionized teachers are now confronting the limitations imposed by taxpayers unwilling to pay for the excellence they demand, and unwilling to believe that even dedication yields to economic necessity. Similarly, publishers are not inclined to accept the fact that the endless stream of eager young aspirants pouring out of the colleges and universities every year and willing to work for substandard wages is ever going to dry up. For years, that stream has been flowing and publishing has been a buyer's market—a continuing glut of talented (and quite a few not-so-talented) people.

Salary scales in publishing have moved extremely slowly, and they remain far below general scales in the communications industry, particularly at the starting level. Publishers, involved in their own economic problems, simply assert that parity is inherently impossible. The corporations and conglomerates which now own so much of publishing, and who have changed its nature beyond recognition, are inclined to look at personnel in corporate terms, that is, as data on a sheet or a printout rather than as the human beings they have always been.

The facts are forcing an ultimate showdown in this area. What kind of a future can the hopeful students in these expanding publishing programs expect? They are told that a degree or attending the summer courses is no guarantee of a job, yet they persist, as always, and many of them do find positions. Their starting salaries may be as low as \$10,000 or even lower, seldom more than \$13,000. In a city like New York, where the majority of publishing houses are, that means a beginner must live with someone, be supported by someone at least partially, or find a place

in a dangerous near-slum. The fact that many of them do so is a testimonial to the glamorous image of publishing which still attracts graduates.

But the inexorable facts of economic life are beginning to end this perennially happy situation for the publishers. Just as good teachers are slipping out of the system faster than the schools of education can pump inferior products into it, so are the signs of short supply beginning to be felt. It is no secret that the quality of editorial work, generally speaking, in major publishing houses is not what it once was. Work tends to be divided these days into marketing and the business side of publishing—where computer technology creates the same kind of revolution as it has produced elsewhere—and the editorial side—where work is done in the same traditional way, for the most part, yet with decreasing attention to excellence. Under corporate control, the idea is to sell. Graduates who emerge from publishing programs still not disillusioned by what they have heard—and that happens—find themselves living in a different world from those who entered publishing as recently as the Graduate Institute's class of 1962.

There are falling enrollments in some publishing courses, increasing ones in others. It is too soon to tell. But if publishing becomes a corporation job like any other, it seems probable that college graduates will seek the more lucrative corporate ladder in other kinds of businesses. Advancement in publishing tends to be more rapid, especially in such areas as promotion and publicity, but the salary ceiling can be reached rather quickly, and the choice becomes settling for what has been achieved or moving to another business. There is a considerable outward movement.

Another negative factor with which publishing courses must deal is continued resistance on the part of employers. Nan Talese, for example, vice-president and executive editor of Houghton Mifflin, doubts that "there are any really effective training programs," and that "experience in the job" is the greatest teacher. She advises aspirants to read Scott Berg's biography of Max Perkins. But Perkins lived in the past world of publishing; except for three or four houses, he would be unemployable today. Older editors and executives perpetuate the ideas of that world, just as the newspaper people did before them, until the graduates prove them wrong.

What, exactly, are the publishing programs giving these graduates that makes them more valuable as employees than as though they came in over the transom, as manuscripts were once said to do. (Today, in many houses, unsolicited manuscripts are returned unopened or unread

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unless preceded by a query letter.) Overall, the courses are designed to acquaint the students with the entire range of publishing opportunities. Many students have enrolled with the vague idea of being an editor and meeting interesting people. From the courses they learn that trade publishing is only a small part of the book world, that there are textbooks, scientific and technological books, children's books, and other specializations. They learn that editors, too, are only a small part of the whole apparatus, which also includes the several steps in producing the book and selling it.

This knowledge not only enables them to make career choices—converting hopeful editors into production people, college travelers, or publicity workers—but it sends people into the publishing world who are already knowledgeable about the business, sometimes amazingly so, saving both theirs and the employer's time when they start work.

The courses also introduce the students into that network of those already in it who are the sources of employment. People in publishing have always moved around in the business through these personal contacts, which are constantly proliferating, and it helps to have a head start. It is common, in fact, for those in publishing classes to be hired on the spot by the experts who come to do the lecturing.

Not everyone who attends publishing programs goes into the business, and those who don't say they have found the experience—primarily the in-depth view they get of how an industry operates—valuable in other occupations.

Several programs do not confine their curricula to the book world, but include magazine work as well, opening the door to a much larger part of the communications industry. At both Radcliffe and NYU, for example, students spend half of their six-weeks course listening to experts from magazines, and practicing what is preached by preparing prototypes of new magazines, which include both editorial and business plans. Similarly, book publishing projects are carried out in the other half of the course, with assignments to be completed in advance.

At Denver, the course is centered entirely on books, and like the best of the others, it covers every aspect of the business but there is extra emphasis on marketing. The Denver Institute tracks its graduates carefully, as does Radcliffe, and its alumni spirit is high—creating, eventually, another network, as the best schools of journalism have done, which will lead to future employment of Denver graduates.

Rice's program offers a different approach to publishing education, or at least a variation on the standard, by what it calls "simulation," in which students are divided into competitive publishing

houses, with mock names ("Doublenight," for instance), budgets, and actual manuscripts to work on. Students decide on what job they want to do, as far as possible, through job descriptions, and they carry out the entire publishing process with at least some semblance of reality. Rice directs its efforts mostly toward regional and specialized publishing, an approach which has resulted in several graduates' setting up small presses.

One of the more recent publishing programs is at Howard University, where the institute is a part of the university press, whose director is Charles Harris, a former Doubleday and Random House editor. While the program was started to serve minority students, recent classes have been about evenly divided.

Stanford offers what is probably the shortest course in publishing education—only twelve days—but it is directed toward those already in the business who are prospects for middle management positions. In spite of this specialization, Stanford also has the highest enrollment, a maximum of 150 carefully screened students, who divide themselves into book and magazine work, with a few general sessions for both. Six case studies, in the manner of the Harvard Business School, are required of them.

Obviously, publishing education combines theory and practice in a variable mix that appears to work well, for the most part. General surveys of the industry, whether books or magazines, comprise the core of the curriculum, more intensive in some than in others. The faculties are drawn from professionals in the business, and they include many of the important names. These lecturers offer their services gratis for a minimal honorarium out of a sense of obligation to the industry they serve, as a result of an urge for new experience, nostalgia for the campus, mixed personal motives, and often because of the natural human feeling of doing something prestigious by lecturing at a university. Whatever their motive, it is the publishing professionals' collective willingness to do extra work in the hot summer weather that makes the programs possible. Those who devote time and effort to academic-year programs exhibit the dedication of true teachers, since the rewards are in job satisfaction, not the pocketbook.

Results have been encouraging in terms of job placement. Estimates range from Radcliffe's 95 percent employment record to more modest 40-60 percent ratios in the other schools. For some graduates, the courses are valuable because they help them decide that publishing is not the career they really want. Those who use the courses as a means of continuing education may or may not get better jobs in the places where

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they are already employed; statistics are scanty. But in any case, the gain in knowledge cannot help making them more employable.

Those who have studied publishing education from the beginning believe that one of its chief assets has been to improve the position of women. For fifty years or more, publishing has employed a great many women, most of whom had to be content with jobs which stopped well short of the top. A major house, for example, might have ten editors, eight of whom would be men, and there would be no female executives—always with a few exceptions, of course. Publicity and promotion departments, however, were almost entirely the province of women, and so were children's books.

Publishing courses, beginning with Radcliffe, trained women to aspire to better things, and equipped them to handle higher opportunities. Most students in these courses, it may be added, are women. Today the old barriers are falling rapidly, and there are more female executives at every level and in every department of publishing than anyone would have thought possible just twenty years ago. Not all of them are graduates of publishing courses, by any means (the percentage may be relatively small) but the upward push of these graduates is becoming more visible, as the follow-up records disclose. It is not unknown for a woman graduate of Radcliffe, or NYU or Denver to go directly from school to a position as assistant to an executive in some publishing department. The rise to the top can be rapid.

On the other hand, for both sexes, the rise can be discouragingly slow, or even nonexistent. If there is a common complaint among graduates who have been on the job for a few years, it is that many publishers still believe that "apprenticeship" means long hours, low pay, and hard work for the same kind of rewards which are presumed to keep teachers teaching until they burn out. The wonder of it is that so many of these people continue to hold on to some kind of idealism and endure it, hoping for the best. While there are no reliable statistics to measure it, the flow out of publishing by disillusioned workers is increasing.

For women, too, in spite of greatly increased opportunities and their mass invasion of the executive level, traditional attitudes still prevail in many houses. Those who do not rise to the top quickly are likely to encounter the concealed agenda of bosses who believe young women don't really have to work, that they are only waiting for marriage, when they will abandon careers for children and housekeeping. In the present state of society, it seems incredible that such attitudes should persist in a supposedly liberal business, but some aspects of

old-fashioned publishing have died hard, and this is one of them. Complicating the situation of women in publishing still further, many of the best men have been lured away to related areas such as advertising and magazine publishing, which has had the effect of pushing many of the less-qualified men to the top. Many of them are truly threatened by able women most of whom have nowhere else to go. In the past women used publishing courses such as NYU's as a way to gain skills and confidence that qualified them for in-house promotions. Closing down publishing education programs will limit chances for on-the-job advancement for many.

There is also some disillusionment with books themselves among graduates. Those on the editorial side who hoped to emulate the great editors of the past and discover new Hemingways or Fitzgeralds may find themselves preoccupied with romance novels or similar category-fiction. On the other hand, once exposed to the broad range of specializations which compose contemporary publishing, such editors may find an opportunity to pursue personal interests they have brought with them. This is particularly true for those who discover the thousands of small houses which have sprung up everywhere in the country in the past two decades.

There are those who believe that the answer to increasing attrition among young recruits in publishing—whether or not they are graduates of publishing courses—is to devise better programs of in-house training. Doubleday was a pioneer in this field with its internships, which produced a notable number of people who became key personnel. Variations on this theme might include more of the training offered by the defunct Graduate Institute, which involved a full day of work, on a Friday, in a publishing house, after four days (and two nights, sometimes three) of work in the classroom. Obviously, this would only be possible in programs running the full academic year.

That raises another question: How much education for publishing is advisable or necessary? "Necessary" can be disregarded, since there is no hope of agreement on that point. "Advisable" can be argued. Based on the extremely high success rate of the Graduate Institute at NYU, it could reasonably be asserted that this intensive program, far more demanding than most academic curricula save for medicine and the law, paid off. Certainly its graduates think so, and they have not regretted the full academic year they gave to it. But the six-week summer programs have also produced an impressive number of graduates who have done well in the business, and they could just as reasonably contend that it was enough.

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For this writer, who has directed both kinds of programs, there is no satisfactory substitute for intensive training, even in a business where chance frequently appears to play as important a role as talent. The business of publishing is becoming much more complex than it has ever been, and the demands being made on those involved in it are much greater than they were even a quarter-century ago. There is some empirical evidence to show that an alarming percentage of workers in the field are not up to what is asked of them. We insist on intensive graduate work for medicine, the law, and university teaching—even for high school instruction—so it seems only logical to insist on advanced and intensive instruction for those who want to enter a profession which is so vital a contributor to the political and cultural life of the nation. Samuel Vaughan was quite correct in terming publishing “the accidental profession,” but in the new Age of the Computer, such casual recruiting may prove to be wholly inadequate. Publishers may need to develop more systematic recruitment procedures, greater financial rewards, and better training in both the technology and the decision-making processes involved in modern publishing.

For book publishing, as for any other business, it is important to keep bringing into it young people with new ideas, who are willing to experiment and overturn old ideas. One of publishing’s major problems in the past century has been its unwillingness to break with the past until it was compelled by events to do so. While the changes that have come about may be dismaying to those brought up in a different atmosphere, no one can expect the past to be maintained, much less recaptured. Publishing, which has sometimes been described as the largest floating crap game in the world, desperately needs new gamblers and new visions if it is to survive in a technologically competitive society. It has nowhere else to look for help than the educational programs which may quite possibly be the only source when the traditional flow—to which everyone has been accustomed for so long—has dwindled away to a trickle.

Reference

1. Eastman, Ann Heidbreder, and Lee, Grant. “Education for Publishing: A Survey Report and ‘Directory of Courses in Book Publishing’” (compiled for the Publishing Division of Special Libraries Association and the American Association of Publishers, Inc., unpublished, mimeographed) 1976; and Shaffer, Susan E. *Guide to Book Publishing Courses: Academic and Professional Programs*. Princeton, N.J.; Peterson’s Guides, 1979.