Getting Published: some ideas to consider

Teaching Development | Wāhanga Whakapakari Ako

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August 2011
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Publication is a fact of an academic’s life. It has long been an accepted part of the way that universities act as a “critic and conscience of society” (Education Amendment Act, 1989) that staff working in universities should both conduct research and publish their work. Publication is a way of contributing to knowledge production and further development in one’s discipline area. Publication of teaching-related inquiry is also a way of enriching the profession of teaching and working to ensure that students are supported to optimal achievement.

While the workshop mainly considers how, where and what to get published, it would be good if workshop participants could also reflect on the ‘whys’ of publication in their own areas. Let’s take a minute or two to brainstorm these reasons.

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The current pressure to publish in a Performance-Based Research Funding (PBRF) environment means that staff may struggle to balance research and publication requirements against teaching requirements, and the University has a workload model that seeks to achieve balance in this area. However, further analysis of how to ensure this balance goes beyond the scope of this workshop.

**Presenters and supporting material**

There is a range of support for staff wishing to publish academic articles available in the University. In this workshop, we will have presentations from Jillene Bydder of the Library; from Prof. Dawn Penney of Sports and Leisure Studies (Faculty of Education) and from Prof. Terry Locke, Arts and Language Education (Faculty of Education). Both are experienced academics with substantial publication records who will give you suggestions about where, what and how to get published.

In addition, the suggestions below were advanced by Sally Brown from Leeds University, a TDU Visiting Speaker in 2010:

- Read at least 3 back copies of journal to determine tone, word type (polysyllabic, simple) etc.
- Read their instructions to authors!
- Get things in on time (or at least warn editors if tardy)
• Don’t finish a section at the end of the day – leave something to ‘get you started’ the next day

• Publication possibilities: international peer reviewed (look at who’s on the editorial board for ‘known people’; start in ‘newer’ journals if you’re a novice

• Books: look at who publishes (e.g. Oxford University Press vs. Self-published); edited versions less prestigious; co-edited even less. Translations in multiple languages good.

• Monographs

• Book reviews: good for getting known, not necessarily prestigious

• Conferences: proceedings not necessarily prestigious but can lead to ‘special editions’ which are better

• e-Journals – patchy, may or may not be good

• Newspapers likewise; being a columnist can be good

• Magazines, course materials can be good or not

• Reports for public bodies and funded research are other ways to get published

• Try a fast email to an editor following a controversial article offering to reply

Other forms of support that may be helpful are the establishment of a ‘writing circle’ (see TDU Talk, May/June 2011, the article by Earl, Clarkin-Phillips, Edwards, Ferrier-Kerr and Carr) available from http://www.waikato.ac.nz/tdu/pdf/tdutalk/MayJun11.pdf
You will likely find that other academics and writers across the globe are good resources to help you in your search for publications. One example appears below (I googled in the area, came up with this handy article, and got permission from Charlotte to republish. She’s asked that I particularly refer you to her “PhD2Published” site, the link for which is embedded in the article below). I’d like to thank Charlotte for this supportive approach, and recommend that you take note of the points she’s making in this article.

Getting published: what academics need to know

*Peer-to-peer sharing helped Charlotte Frost land a book deal. She gives her top tips for going from PhD to getting published* [http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/apr/27/getting-published-academics](http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/apr/27/getting-published-academics)

Publishing is an extremely competitive market but by sharing her experiences online Charlotte was able to interest from an academic publisher.

At heart, I’m a digital researcher, often overly evangelical about the benefits of freely sharing information online. In head, however, I recognise publishing books remains an integral part of academia. After my PhD, I realised I’d need to discover how on earth I might get a book published in an increasingly competitive market – not to mention find a way of reconciling these, the yin and yang of my academic being.
I wasn't alone in exhibiting this apparently split-academic-personality disorder. Much of academia has been in conflict since the arrival of the web. So I decided to find a way of learning about all aspects of the somewhat 'closed source' field of academic publishing (including: how to successfully pitch a book idea to a publisher; get through the peer-review process; write the book on time; co-market the final work; keep up to date on the impact of digital and internet technologies on academic publishing) while staying true to my 'open source' researcher roots.

In January 2010, I started writing my first book proposal. Meanwhile, I set up a website dedicated to sharing everything I was learning along the way about pitching books and managing an academic career.

Unsurprisingly, my initial book proposal was rejected. But by then something very important was happening. I'd realised just how little I'd actually known about academic publishing, while other people – in ever-increasing numbers – were reporting the exact same realisation. My rejected proposal was bigger than me: it spoke of an acutely felt gap in the collective knowledge of emerging academics everywhere.
The online resource was a tremendous success before it was year old. It was popular with a range of post-docs, I’d landed a book deal and had rapidly expanded my skill-set and professional network – not to mention I was off to Sweden on a post-doctoral fellowship (to research a new and intertwined project on publishing). At that stage I was able to take the site to the next level and turn PhD2Published into a peer-to-peer mentoring tool.

I had planned from the outset that if the site did get me a contract with an academic press, I’d hand over editorial control to someone else, so they could repeat my results. Much of what is needed in successfully writing and publishing a book is mirrored by successfully blogging about your research – it’s even giving traditional publishing a run for its (metaphorical) money. If the site was going to reference open source culture – combining the freedoms of the internet with information on how to do something – it had to provide hands-on experience running a research resource as well. Indeed, if PhD2Published was going to unite the yin/yang of digital academia, it would expand the e-age researcher’s abilities at every level.

And so, in the spirit of continued sharing, here are my own top five tips on getting published:
Think about your market

If you want to end up with a printed book published by a reputable academic press, you will need to make a case for its economic viability. This means market research. Don't just tell your publisher the book would appeal to course X, Y and Z, tell them why. What exactly does it do that other books in the field don't? How will it transform teaching in this area? Why will course managers make students read your book over the others on their list? Show the publisher there's a really good chance your book will sell – preferably in decent numbers.

Don't go in cold

Is there a way you can make publishers aware of you before you pitch to them? This doesn't mean an email introducing yourself, or saying "Hi" at a book fair (although these aren't entirely terrible ideas), it means finding a way onto their radar and – if at all possible – getting them to approach you. Partly, this can be achieved by speaking at high profile events and making your work appeal to as broad an audience as possible, but organising for them to speak at your institution or launch a book there are great ways too.
Don't tell publishers that your book will be the first of its kind – even if that's true

The publisher will need to understand which established markets your book will sell to. If you tell them it's like nothing else, you're actually telling them there's no established market. This is the last thing they want to hear because it takes a lot of time and money to create a market from scratch. If, however, you can describe your book as structured like Writer A's, or containing a discussion that counter-argues Writer B's, they know straight away who else they might sell it to.

What can you offer your publisher besides the book itself?

Publishing is a business so you'll be more appealing as a potential author if you can help sell your book. Have you got contacts at a high profile venue for the launch? What other events could your book be sold at? Who is well-known and can review it? Have you considered doing a virtual book tour or making a video trailer? Do you have other promotional ideas or institutional tie-ins? Are you good with social media and can you build interest now? All these and more can feature in your proposal if they are definite ways you can increase sales.
Think outside the book

Is your work better suited to becoming a set of journal articles? With many academic publishers now producing eBook versions of texts, consider the benefits of going digital. While it’s lovely to have something physical to show for your work, it might be faster, cheaper and more attuned to your topic, career strategy and philosophy to publish an eBook. And if time is really of the essence, think about the benefits of the web – you might well reach a bigger audience, make a name for yourself internationally and land that job sooner.

Dr Charlotte Frost is broadcaster and academic focusing on art’s relationship with technology. A specialist in the impact of the internet on art history and criticism, she is currently writing her own first book, Art History Online; editing an experimental book series Arts Future Book; and overseeing PhD2Published.
In conclusion:
By the time you have listened to Jillene, Dawn and Terry, read the Writing Circle article in TDU Talk, the notes from Sally Brown and the article by Charlotte, you should have a good idea about how to get started.

My own thoughts are that you are also wise to look at what has gained top-ranking scores in your own disciplinary area for PBRF (recognising that there’s a lot of ‘game playing’ that happens in this process, and that high status publications are not necessarily those that are easily accessed by practitioners needing to know about the work), and lastly, be prepared to be humble in responding to reviewer feedback. It can feel quite devastating to get severe critiques back on your carefully-written work, but it’s how we all learn to write more appropriately and to a higher standard (think back to your PhD experiences!). All the best with your publication endeavours.