

**Article: “Beyond the Audience of One: Producing a Student
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Beyond the Audience of One: Producing a Student Journal of Politics

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Writing assignments are common in most political science courses. If nothing else, they serve the purpose of allowing instructors to exercise their evaluative power in assigning grades. All too often, however, they fail to transcend this purpose. As a result, both students and instructors often view each student paper as a private communication between the two parties—a work with no future and an audience of one (Zeiser 1999; Fulwiler 1982).

In contrast, professors typically prepare their own writing in hopes of reaching a wider, professional audience. Academics understand that writing is not just a means of displaying what one has learned; it is itself a learning process. If students' writing and publishing experiences could be brought to resemble more closely those of their teachers and academic mentors, they would likely enjoy some of the same benefits. It was this line of thought that prompted us, in the fall of 1999, to begin a student journal to showcase exemplary student writing on politics. Now entering its seventh year of production, and with a staff of a dozen student editors, our annual issue averages 150 pages, contains approximately seven to 10 peer-reviewed articles (the acceptance rate is around 30%), and also in-

cludes a wide variety of other types of political pieces ranging from article, book, and film reviews to political poetry and photography.

The resulting journal, *Studium: The Student Journal of Politics*, has proved to be a highly effective means of using multi-draft writing assignments to increase the level of professionalism with which students approach their work. Ultimately, this article provides the tools necessary to structure, design, and implement a student-run journal, and we hope it will encourage other political science instructors to make use of this very effective, but at present, insufficiently utilized pedagogical tool.

Benefits of a Student Journal

Benefits to Students as Authors

Academics know from experience how useful the process of writing, rewriting, polishing, and responding to criticism and feedback is, not only in improving the quality of a particular paper but also in improving and deepening one's understanding of the subject matter in question. Extending this logic to students, the most valuable writing assignments will be those that move beyond reliance on the single-draft assignment and instead require engagement in a writing and revision process that includes intense evaluation and feedback from one or more readers (Bob 2001; Zeiser 1999). Preparing a manuscript for publication affords students just such an opportunity.

Unlike the typical writing assignment, which is a solitary enterprise with a fixed termination date (so that instructor comments and suggestions are more often than not regarded as irrelevant), preparing a paper for publication is a communal project, generally requiring several rounds of criticism and response between editors and authors. Student authors do not go through the revision process alone; rather they receive personalized, detailed feedback from student editors on how to strengthen their papers.

The opportunity to present the results of their efforts to peers, and the knowl-

edge that their work will undergo public scrutiny, motivates students to expend considerably higher levels of effort than they otherwise would. Indeed, publication seems to increase the sense of ownership that student authors feel in regards to their own work. Their work is no longer just an assignment prepared for the instructor, but rather a public record of the students' own ideas, thoughts, arguments, and original findings or analysis. Student authors have told us they feel a remarkable sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, and enthusiasm for writing that goes well beyond the pleasure of receiving a good grade or praise from an instructor. Finally, student authors benefit from citing their publications on resumes and graduate and law school applications. In fact, several previous students report that these publications have been a key factor in their success in obtaining jobs upon graduation.

Benefits to Students as Editors

The benefits for student editors are even more profound than those enjoyed by authors. Student editors assess each paper closely and offer the student author detailed feedback, a process which arguably requires more of the student editors than of the student authors. They must consider multiple aspects of the paper, including many which they may rarely have explicitly considered in their role as student writers: Is the theme of the paper appropriate for the journal (that is, is it about politics or political science)? Is the purpose of the paper clear? Are the arguments and evidence clearly presented and thoroughly developed? Is there a clear and logical flow of ideas and arguments throughout the paper? Does the conclusion fit the data? Is the paper properly cited and in the prescribed style? Are there grammar or punctuation problems? And so on.

Of course, it is not enough that students uncover difficulties in the papers they are assigned. The second and more important component of their task is to suggest solutions and to do so in a diplomatic manner. For example, an editor who has diagnosed a particular argument

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as weak must be able to explain where precisely the argument fails. Providing possible solutions, and doing so in a tactful manner, develops student editors' diplomacy skills in dealing with their peers—skills that will also be invaluable in the workplace.

Through this process student editors and student authors grow to appreciate and understand the role of diligent re-drafting to improve a paper. They see how an author's arguments develop, thinking clarifies, and knowledge of their subject matter deepens because of the process of revision. The ultimate lesson is that effective writing and critical thinking both improve with effort. Finally, the particular advantage of this process is that students learn lessons actively, by doing, rather than passively, by being told.

Benefits to Students as Readers

Once the journal is published and distributed, its benefits extend beyond the student authors and editors. The journal exposes its student audience to the diverse and interesting range of topics and approaches that our discipline addresses and utilizes. Furthermore, the journal exposes students to the exemplary work of their peers, which can serve as useful models to students in preparing papers for specific courses. Instructors can best illustrate their guidelines and expectations by assigning the published student papers originally written in their courses. Students can turn to the journal with confidence knowing that they have a quality example of the type of paper they are expected to produce. As London (1993, 529) notes: "Above all, students need models of the *kinds* of writing they are being asked to do; here, past successful student papers are invaluable."

Organizing and Producing a Student Journal of Politics

Early in the development of *Stodium* we decided that building a course around the production of the journal would best capitalize on the hands-on nature of student organizations while maintaining the educative process of the classroom. Integrating the journal production process into a course experience is best organized around several key steps: 1) selecting and evaluating the journal staff and selecting collaborators, 2) soliciting and selecting papers and other work, 3) editing the selected papers, 4) locating funding for the journal, 5) promoting and distributing the journal, and, finally, 6) scheduling journal production.

1. Selecting and Evaluating the Journal Staff and Selecting Collaborators

In addition to two instructors, our journal staff consists of 12 to 15 students. Students enroll in this course for three units in the fall and three in the spring semester, with faculty permission. We recruit students through our other courses, most often by showing past issues as examples. Students who have previously served on our journal staff have also recruited interested students. Finally, other faculty encourage students to consider becoming members of the staff.

Most of our student editors are learning how to edit for the first time. For this reason, and to capitalize on the highly interactive nature of small groups, we decided that it was necessary to keep the size of the course small—10 to 15 students. Each year our staff consists primarily of juniors and seniors, but we often have one or two graduate students involved as well. The students are primarily political science majors, but we also have one or two journalism and English majors involved each year.

The journal staff meets weekly through the academic year to carry out the necessary tasks to produce the journal, which are described in the sections below. At the beginning of the year students are assigned or volunteer for particular tasks, and are assigned deadlines. This assignment process is typically done on the basis of each student's abilities. For example, students with a background in editing take on more work during the editing stage of journal production. Students with public relations or communications backgrounds organize the paper solicitation campaign and promote the journal. Students with strong computer skills update and maintain the journal webpage. And so on. Students are evaluated on the successful and timely completion of their assigned tasks. While this evaluation is a necessary component of a course, the weekly meetings are run much like those of a student organization, where task assignment is made on a rolling basis and students report on their progress. The faculty supervisors preside over these weekly meetings much as faculty would in a graduate seminar. However, it is also necessary to run some meetings more like a classroom or workshop in order to teach the skills needed to review, select, and, finally, to edit the papers.

In addition to involving students as journal staff, the production of the journal also relies upon collaboration with students through several other courses at

the university. Each year our class collaborates with an introductory-level graphic design class. Our journal staff, serving as "clients," describes our needs for a cover design to the "freelance" design students who produce sample cover designs. Our journal staff then selects a favorite cover design each year for the journal. Recently, we have also begun collaborating with a senior-level graphic design course to produce promotional materials such as posters. Finally, we have collaborated with English editing courses to assist with the editing process.

2. Soliciting and Selecting Papers and Other Work

One of our most difficult tasks has been getting students to submit their work. Often the best student writers are the most reluctant to submit. Students also have a narrow conception of what constitutes "political" work. Thus, students from other disciplines (including history, philosophy, and sociology, among others) may be writing papers that include substantial political components and yet fail to see *Stodium* as an appropriate venue for their work. Similarly, students whose work is primarily creative (for instance, poets or photographers) sometimes falsely assume that our editors are interested only in traditional research papers. Moreover, most students, and particularly those in the social sciences, are not familiar with the importance of publication. To combat this situation, we must actively solicit submissions. Some of our solicitation is done through the typical means available to us at the university—the university paper, the university web page, tables in the student union, and posters and flyers. However, the most effective method is for journal staff and political science instructors to approach students directly. Our journal staff visits numerous courses to explain the submission process and discuss the various benefits of publication for student authors. Instructors identify their top student writers and encourage them to submit. We typically receive approximately 40 submissions each year; without this sort of direct faculty involvement, the number would be significantly smaller.

Although the final submission deadline is the end of the fall semester, the selection process begins as soon as the first few submissions arrive. We introduce students to this process by reviewing the submissions (in a blind review) and discussing as a group the criteria for a well-written paper. Such criteria include: Is there a clear thesis? Is the

paper/work political in nature and why? Does the paper properly credit sources? And so forth.

By the end of October, we have developed and discussed our criteria for review and students have begun to review early submissions. Papers attaining a sufficiently high level of quality—those publishable with, at most, very minor copyediting—are marked as accepted (though no acceptance decisions are announced until after the final submission deadline). A somewhat larger group of initial submissions are rejected outright. The remaining papers are those that are judged to have substantial merits but which nonetheless require a significant amount of revision. These are assigned to various staff editors. The editors then contact the authors and offer them a chance to revise and resubmit their papers for final consideration.

In the journal's first few years, the selection process did not begin until the submission deadline had passed. However, with a substantial number of papers coming in at the end of the fall semester, this policy created a tremendous amount of work for *Stodium* staff in the interval between their mid-January return to campus and the mid-March formatting deadline. The entire review and selection process, author revisions, final editing, and layout all needed to be completed during this relatively short period. The solution was obvious: begin the review of early submissions as they arrived. As a result, though we still face a bit of a deadline crunch in spring semester, it is far less challenging and stressful than it used to be.

3. Editing the Selected Papers

Once the list of accepted papers is finalized, we usually have three weeks to devote to editing and revision. Each staff member is assigned one or two papers to edit. Editors work closely with student authors, explaining the editing process and assisting with revisions. The amount of editing required varies significantly: some papers require almost none, while others need significant changes in the areas of grammar, style, formatting, fact-checking, and citations.

After editing the papers, we pass the electronic files on to a graphic designer at the university whom we pay to format the journal. These files must be delivered to the formatter in mid-March, approximately six weeks after the beginning of the spring semester.

Our current practice is to do all of our own editing for the journal. Initially, we collaborated with an editing class, but we soon found that our deadlines made this

Table 1
Production Schedule for Student Journal Course

Stage One: Setting the Agenda (Early September to October)
• Set yearly goals and establish a production schedule
• Design promotional materials and coordinate activities to encourage submissions
• Write grant proposals for funding, if needed
• Attend editing workshops conducted by students and faculty members from the departments of English and political science
• Begin reviewing submitted papers
Stage Two: Paper Selection and Copyediting (November to February)
• Select and edit papers with publication potential
• Contact student authors to assist with editing and revisions
• Meet with the graphics design class to produce the journal cover design
Stage Three: Production and Printing (February to May)
• Complete final edits, journal layout, and formatting
• Perform the final proofing
• Submit final copy to the printers
• Organize and host an authors' reception and journal release party
• Distribute copies of the journal to student authors and sponsoring instructors, university libraries, the campus bookstore, participating schools, and alumnae

difficult, and, more importantly, that farming out the editing of some of our most critical work provided no benefit to the journal staff. Feedback from previous student journal staff has consistently reinforced that students build their own writing skills through the process of reviewing and assisting with the revision of their peers' papers. Moreover, we usually have one or two students from the departments of journalism and English who have taken editing courses, and who are thus assigned a larger role in this process, including conducting workshops and assisting other students.

4. Funding the Journal

The main costs of the journal involve its formatting and printing. We use formatters at the university, which cost from \$300 to \$500, depending upon the size of the journal and how many graphics are involved. The cost of the university's printing service ranges from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for around 200 copies of the journal, again depending upon the size and graphics involved. Consequently, our highest budget has been around \$3,500, which makes the student journal a fairly low cost activity when compared to other student organizations—debate teams, for instance—which often involve travel and other substantial costs. Nonetheless, funding will be an issue at many universities. During our first two years we managed on a shoestring budget, funding the project through a small grant from our department and by selling copies of the journals. In our third year, we successfully applied for a renewable grant

from our university's instructionally related activities fund that covers all of our production costs.

5. Promoting and Distributing the Journal

Most of our promotion is still done by word of mouth, which is fairly effective given our needs and the size of our student community. Most particularly, many students are exposed to the journal by professors who choose to use it in their classrooms as a model for effective student writing. Right now, the journal is utilized in a handful of courses, but now that the full journal is available online (www.csuchico.edu/pols/stodium), we hope that it will come to be used in a greater number and variety of courses.

Copies of the journal are distributed to all department of political science faculty and many students in the department. The journal is also available at both the campus bookstore and the university library. Distribution to student authors and other directly involved students takes place at a journal release party held at the end of the year. In the future, we hope to be able to provide free copies of the journal to alumni of the department.

6. Scheduling Journal Production

Our experience strongly suggests that in order to make the production of the journal an educative process that involves students as journal staff and collaborates with other courses, the production must be a year-long process. Consequently, the production of *Stodium*

begins in September and ends in early May. The students work independently and with each other in weekly meetings to complete all tasks and meet deadlines in accordance with the schedule (see Table 1).

The first stage of production is extremely demanding. In the classroom, student editors attend weekly editing workshops to prepare for the challenging tasks of reviewing, evaluating, selecting, and editing the submissions. Outside the classroom, they are involved in hands-on activities to promote the journal and encourage student submissions from across the disciplines. Student editors design posters and electronic announcements, write press releases, visit classrooms, and arrange promotion tables at campus events and in the student union. They also plan and coordinate the activities of the other parties involved in journal production, including the public relations, graphic design, and formatting student groups.

The second stage of production is somewhat more relaxed and the activities

of the editorial staff more concentrated. The primary duties are to select the final papers, choose a cover design, and begin editing the selected papers.

During the third stage of production the demands intensify. The student editors collaborate with the student authors and assist them with the editing of their papers and any needed revisions. They finish editing individual papers, lay out the journal, and then edit the entire product. Then they submit the journal to the formatters, proof the formatters' work, and finally submit the journal to the printers. In the meantime, the student editors make the final preparations for the authors' reception and journal release party. This year-long production process is necessary to provide the full educative benefits to the student editors. Indeed, even with the entire academic year at our disposal, we still feel the pressure of deadlines, particularly from February to May. However, this deadline pressure only contributes to the hands-on nature of the project and prepares students for the world beyond school.

Conclusion

After six years of journal production, we have become even more firmly convinced that a student journal offers students unique opportunities not available through more traditional writing assignment models. Such a journal gives student authors a chance to place their papers in a peer-reviewed publication and to reference their publication on resumes and graduate or law school applications. It gives student editors the chance to read, evaluate, and edit a wide array of papers. Through these experiences they learn that writing is an active, evolutionary process. Moreover, student readers are provided with the exemplary work of their peers on which they can then model their own endeavors. In short, for all those involved, a student journal, both as a production process and as a tangible product of that process, provides students with work that has a future and reaches far beyond an audience of one.

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