



Building a Career Within and Beyond the Health and Medical Humanities

A series of events for doctoral and early career researchers

Organisers: Tracey Loughran (University of Essex) / Harriet Cooper (UEA)

Publishing in the Health and Medical Humanities

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- Panellists**
- David Cantor (co-series editor, Social Histories of Medicine, Manchester University Press)
 - Des Fitzgerald (Professor of Medical Humanities and Social Sciences, University College Cork)
 - Tracey Loughran (Professor of History, University of Essex)

Preparing book proposals

- There are (potentially) five groups that form the first audience for your proposal:
 - Series editor (if you are pitching to a particular series)
 - Commissioning editor
 - Worth approaching the series/commissioning editor informally before submitting a proposal
 - Scope out whether press will be interested in topic
 - Also allows you to assess whether these are people you want to work with
 - Editorial board
 - Crucial in issuing contracts
 - Not necessarily specialists in your field
 - May come from several different disciplines/areas
 - Marketing department

- Important in assessing risks/benefits
 - Peer reviewers
 - Presses will send the proposal and any accompanying materials (such as sample chapters) out for peer review
 - MUP requires at least two positive peer reviews to issue a contract
- Investigate different series and presses to check which might be best for your project – this can include informal enquiries to different editors
 - But when you decide to submit a formal proposal, only do so at one press
 - Presses are often reluctant to consider proposals under review elsewhere
 - The pool of peer reviewers is quite small, and they can be annoyed if they are asked to review the same proposal for different presses
 - But if your initial approach to a press doesn't work out, then it is fine to take the proposal elsewhere
- What do publishers want from a proposal?
 - What the book is about
 - Why the book is important
 - What the book will contribute to existing scholarship
 - Think about the market:
 - What is already out there?
 - What are you doing that is different?
 - What each chapter contributes to the book
- Often publishers will ask for one or more sample chapters
 - This is used to assess writing style/ability to communicate as well as quality of research
 - This affects whether the book is likely to sell sufficient copies
 - For academic presses, this means enough copies to break even
 - For commercial press, it means enough copies to make a profit
 - What won't sell?
 - Abstruse, technical language
 - A book that is too close to a doctoral thesis

- Most doctoral thesis online now – no incentive for presses to publish in same form
 - Doctoral thesis is also a different form to a book: different purpose, different audience
 - Caveat: within Europe, strong tradition of publishing doctoral theses
- Publishers may ask for changes to the proposal and/or sample chapters before sending out for review
 - Changes to style, structure, argument, or evidence base
 - This is not a bad thing – it's good to be able to make changes at an early stage
 - If unclear exactly what the publisher wants from revisions, ask for clarification
- Be aware that the external review process can take several months
 - Following peer review, the press may ask for changes to the proposal, or a letter of response to comments
 - If changes are required, the proposal may need to be sent for review again
 - But if the peer reviews are positive, a contract will be issued
- A contract is useful when applying for academic posts or funding
 - The contract will state that the book will be published subject to satisfactory review
 - So there is a further review process *after* submission of manuscript

Pitching interdisciplinary scholarship

- Usual issues in academic publishing are compounded when publishing interdisciplinary research
 - Don't be discouraged if you encounter obstacles: the problems are structural, not just you

- Be prepared to persevere: pushing through despite obstacles is often painful but gets easier as you go on
- A particular challenge of interdisciplinary research/publishing is that scholars are often trying to build two profiles at once:
 - As an interdisciplinary researcher
 - As a disciplinary expert
 - Trying to capture these two elements in any one article is difficult
- Remember that it's not necessary to be totally interdisciplinary in everything you do
 - Think not of proving your interdisciplinary credentials in every publication
 - But rather of building a profile over time, where you can point to a constellation of attributes and achievements
- How should you explain interdisciplinarity in publications?
 - It's always important to articulate your relationship to a field, and this applies to interdisciplinary research too
 - Say *what* you are doing and *how* you are doing it, and explain how this relates to (for example) health humanities as a field
 - Be wary of 'overclaiming'
 - Often told to really 'sell' research, but this depends on what you are pitching
 - Claims of transformational potential are usually welcomed in funding applications, but less so in journal publications
- Be tactical when you're submitting an article
 - Write a cover letter to the journal editors
 - Explain the importance of your research
 - Explain why it fits with the journal's mission
 - Suggest potential reviewers

- Different publication venues have different affordances for interdisciplinary scholarship
 - Journals tend to be less open – more tied to disciplinary norms
 - But become a journal ethnographer
 - Get a background sense of what journals think they're doing, and who their audience is
 - Books are more open because presses are in the business of selling books
 - Interdisciplinary researchers are good at making connections between topics and ideas
 - This is often appealing to editors, as the researcher is showing the potential for the book to reach wider audiences
 - Open to leftfield ideas if they think these will appeal to different audiences
- Take advantage of special issues
 - Still peer-reviewed, but editors of special issues have some sway over process
 - This creates potential to smuggle more leftfield work into conventionally prestigious journals
 - Also consider pitching your own special issue, perhaps with other doctoral/early career researchers
- Don't ignore science journals
 - These can be valuable in putting your research in front of different audiences
 - These journals are also less liable to specialization in the sense that humanities/social sciences scholars understand it
- Consider co-authorship and collaboration

- Allows bringing together of different expertise
- Also supports interdisciplinarity by building networks
- REF has diminished the status of the single-author article
- Working with others brings all kinds of rewards