

FACULTY of LIBERAL ARTS and PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Writing Department

Professional Writing Program

**Course: PRWR 3004— Books and Bookmaking in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century** [3 credits]

Term: Fall 2023 // Location: McLaughlin College 001

Prerequisite / Co-requisite: PRWR 2006

Course Instructor: Matt Bucemi [[mbucemi@yorku.ca](mailto:mbucemi@yorku.ca)]

Time: Thursdays, 2:30 PM to 5:30 PM

Office Hours: Please email me and we can make an appointment to chat!

Office Location: Ross S309

**Expanded Course Description**

Welcome to the beginning of your exciting publishing journey! This course offers a deep dive into the world of book publishing, from its history to how things really work in publishing houses across North America. We'll examine the structure of a typical publishing company – including acquisitions, editorial, production, art and design, rights and contracts, marketing, sales, customer service, fulfillment, and the business office. In the second half of the course, students will assume the roles of key publishing personnel to complete a major project that will enable them to learn how publishing decisions are made and give them the building blocks for a future career in the publishing field.

Classes include lectures, discussions, activities, debates, and hands-on practice.

**Course Learning Objectives**

Students will be introduced to the form and function of leading English-language book publishing industries as they exist in Canada, the US, and the UK; understand the numerous roles that exist within the publishing industry and how they function individually and together; and develop the critical and collaborative skills required to allow them to experiment with working in a variety of publishing roles.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Describe the organizational structure of the typical book publishing company and the roles played by key personnel.
- Compare and contrast the leading English-language book publishing industries as they exist in Canada and the US.
- Identify the substantive editorial contributions that publishers make to the books they published.
- Explain the history of publishing, from the ancient world to today, and identify important developments and controversies that shaped how we think about books.
- Understand the significant editorial, design, production, and marketing decisions that publishers make that affect the way books are received, perceived, and sought out by readers.

- Emulate the logic behind decisions publishers make concerning the content, design, format, price, and distribution of the books they publish.
- Analyze the forces that continue to shape the industry and are likely to drive demand in the market now and in the near future, including the technological context in which changes in the book industry are occurring.

### **Recommended Course Text / Readings**

Additional readings will be assigned or recommended during the course.

- *The Complete Canadian Book Editor* by Leslie Vermeer
- *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd edition, by John B. Thompson

### **Organization of the Course**

In each class session, we'll examine a different facet of the industry, from editing and acquiring manuscripts to book design, production, and marketing. We'll have great discussions about each topic, along with fun and informative activities that will help you put your publishing knowledge into practice. I'll also present a new publishing scenario in each class for us to debate: how would you deal with working on a book that goes along against your personal values? How would you raise the profile of Canadian authors in the global market?

The publishing industry is by nature collaborative, rather than competitive. Whether a company is 3 people or 30 people or 300 people, you will be required to work together with colleagues toward the common goals of making a book and getting it out into the world. With that in mind, a big portion of this course will be a series of collaborate team workshops in which you'll learn the skills necessary to complete real tasks that you might encounter while working in the publishing field, and to develop and/or strengthen your problem-solving, research, and communication skills.

### **Late Policy**

I will accept late work from students without a penalty, with an important condition: let me know about any issues that you have with an assignment at least five days in advance. We will plan out an alternate day and time to turn in your work. Otherwise, late assignments will receive a deduction of 10% for each day that the assignment is late.

### **Accessibility at York**

I'm 100% committed to making sure that the course is accessible for all students. York's goal is to provide an accessible and welcoming environment for faculty, staff, students, and visitors, both on campus and online. Please visit <https://accessibility.students.yorku.ca/> for more information on York's diversity policies. Please let me know if there's anything that I can do to assist you or if there is any important information that I need to know.

### **Evaluation**

The final grade for the course will be based on the following items, weighted as indicated:

Reading Responses (5 at 2% each) — 10%

Ethical Standards Essay — 10%

Book Proposal — 20%

Acquisitions Project — 20%

Publicity Review and Commentary — 10%

Publishing House Presentation — 10%

Final Reflection — 10%

Participation — 10%

Note: All assignments and tests will be returned to students **one to two weeks** after due dates and/or submission dates.

**Drop deadline (last date to drop a course without receiving a grade): November 8**

## SCHEDULE

Week 1 (September 7)

### Introduction

- What are we going to do this semester?
- Syllabus review and class policies
- Texts, assignments, questions

### What is publishing, anyway?

- The modern publishing landscape
- The Big 5 and independents
- Publishing jobs—what's right for you?

Exercise: Amazon trends review and analysis

Week 2 (September 14)

### Who gets to be heard in the book world?

- Identity, subject position, and exposure
- Diversity in the industry
- Challenges in the Canadian book market

Exercise: Sales catalogue critique

### Required Readings

[CBC: 'We've lost our champions': The fight to save Canadian authors](#)

[The Walrus: How Canada Sold Out Its Publishing Industry](#)

### Reading Response 1 due

Week 3 (September 21)

#### What's the deal with BookTok?

- What should you look for in a manuscript?
- Potential successes and potential problems
- Author platforms: do they matter?

Exercise: Start your own book proposal

#### Required Readings

[Pitt News: BookTok is a mistake](#)

[GQ: In the shallow world of BookTok, being a “reader” is more important than actually reading](#)

[Literary Hub: BookTok is good, actually](#)

#### Recommended Readings

CCBE, Chapter 1: pp 8-23; Chapter 3: pp 47-63

### Reading Response 2 due

Week 4 (September 28)

#### Should people be able to publish *anything*?

- *United States v. One Book Entitled Ulysses by James Joyce*
- Book retail business
- Ethics and values in publishing

Exercise: Halycon and sketchy publishers

#### Required Readings

[Wired: The Long Tail](#)

[ACLU: It's 2022 and Two Books Are on Trial for 'Obscenity'](#)

[Vox: Jordan Peterson, explained](#)

#### Recommended Readings

MOC, Chapter 1: pp 26-58; Chapter 7: pp 238-292

### Reading Response 3 due

Week 5 (October 5)

**Are sensitivity readers good or bad?**

- Sensitivity reading: benefits and drawbacks
- Roald Dahl edits controversy
- Crafting an editorial mandate

Exercise: Acquisitions roundtable

**Required Readings**

[The Conversation: Why sensitivity readers matter – and should be paid properly](#)

[The Guardian: Sensitivity readers—what publishing’s most polarizing role is really about](#)

[Reason: Sensitivity Readers Are the New Literary Gatekeepers](#)

**Recommended Readings**

*CCBE*, Chapter 5: pp 96-116; Chapter 7: pp 148-162

**Reading Response 4 due**

Week 6 (October 12)

**Fall Reading Week—have a great break!**

Week 7 (October 19)

**Why do we still buy physical books?**

- Metadata! What is a book made of?
- Titles and branding
- Contracts and legalities

Exercise: Workshopping title ideas for manuscript

**Recommended Readings**

*CCBE*, Chapter 4: pp 76-95; Chapter 8: pp 189-233

*MOC*, Chapter 9: pp 313-376

**Ethical Standards Essay due**

Week 8 (October 26)

### **How do you convince readers to buy your book?**

- Good and bad attention
- Earned media vs. Paid media
- The ups and downs of social media

Exercise: How to handle a cancelled author

**Special Guest: Serina Mercier, Marketing Director at Sutherland House**

### **Recommended Readings**

*CCBE*, Chapter 9: pp 234-266

Week 9 (November 2)

### **How do you choose the right book cover?**

- Graphics, text, and how to catch someone's eye
- Demographics and comparable titles
- Representing difficult topics and content

Exercise: Cover comparables for your book proposal

### **Recommended Readings**

*CCBE*, Chapter 8: pp 189-205

### **Book Proposal due**

Week 10 (November 9)

### **Is fan fiction the future of books?**

- Is fan fiction a good way to get started?
- Fun and toxicity in fan communities
- What the industry has learned (and hasn't learned) from fanfics

Exercise: From fan fiction to mass market

### **Required Readings**

[The Guardian: How fanfiction went mainstream](#)

[The New Yorker: The Promise and Potential of Fan Fiction](#)

[Medium: Unhealthy Relationship Dynamics in Fanfiction](#)

### **Recommended Readings**

*CCBE* Chapter 6: pp 126-147

MOC, Chapter 3: pp 101-145

### Reading Response 5 due

Week 11 (November 16)

On **November 16th at 6:30 PM**, Dr. Matt Bucemi and York's Book Publishing program will hold the 2023 edition of our publishing speaker series. Our guest is **Lily Bergh**, Publisher and Vice President at Canadian Scholars & Womens Press. Lily will deliver a keynote talk about what it means to be a national leader in redefining who gets to be heard in the book world.

Her talk will be followed by a Q&A and a reception with food and drinks. The event will be held in **Ross S802**.

This event is open to the public, but students in PRWR 3004 and 4004 will **meet earlier at 5 PM** for a workshop and discussion with Lily.

### Acquisitions Project due

Week 12 (November 23)

#### Is it better to self-publish your book?

- Pros and cons of self-publishing
- Dealing with Amazon
- Promoting yourself

Exercise: Self-publishing practicum

#### Required Readings

[The Conversation: Self-publishing may be the answer to shake-ups in the book world...](#)

[Entrepreneur: This Is the Future of Book Publishing](#)

[Medium: The problem with self-publishing](#)

### Publicity Review and Commentary Due

Week 13 (November 30)

#### Wrap-Up Event: Your Publishing Future

#### Publishing House Presentations

#### Final Reflection due