

The Cat's Figment: Jury Project Proposal

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I. Background

As a creative writer, I have often found myself with a completed piece of writing glaring expectantly at me through my computer screen, beating its fists against the confining white walls of its Word document, demanding to be liberated from its electronic file, winged into the literary world to be read, shared, and (hopefully) loved by many. It cries and it begs and it throws loud, obnoxious temper tantrums like a five-year-old in the candy aisle at the grocery store— all to no avail. I sigh and I apologize and I promise to come back after I have found a proper foster home for the poor thing— possibly a second-rate lit magazine, maybe a short-story contest sponsored by the community, even a book deal, who knows?— all the while, I am edging the mouse toward that inconspicuous 'x' at the top right corner that will wipe the screen clean, slam the folder shut, and hide the work away somewhere I will no longer have to listen to its tiresome belly-aching. Such is the dilemma of publication.

When a writer completes a piece of writing what does he *do* with it? Writers invest so much time, effort, and talent into the writing itself they become lost in the step that comes *after* the words are put down on paper. Writers write. Publishing is an entirely different process.

Facing publication, novice writers often fall into one of two categories: 1). They suffer from delusions of grandeur, slap a cover sheet on their short-story and triumphantly send it off to *The New Yorker*, anxiously waiting for the laudatory response from the editors in the Big Apple who *surely* will recognize the sheer genius of the work or 2.) They lack self-confidence in their writing ability, allowing their pieces to ferment in disheveled folders stored in their computer's memory like yeast in dough set to rise, and when they do gather enough courage to send out their work they reach no further than a small community journal with a limited distribution, the audience comprised of friends and relatives.

I fall in the second category. Although I write, I have not published. The closest to publication I have come occurred in the spring semester of my freshman year at the University of Kentucky. I discovered JAR, a modest literary journal, published annually by the Honors Program, and eagerly submitted a short, two-page story I had written on a whim (entitled *Smoke Signals*). Surprisingly, it was selected for publication, as well as a fifty-dollar award. The student editors of JAR contacted me electronically with revisions and comments on the story. I edited it and sent it back and waited to hear from them. But that was it. I was never sent a copy of JAR. I never received a fifty-dollar check. When I checked online the JAR website was down. As far as I know *Smoke Signals* was sucked into a literary vacuum and evaporated like a wisp of the story's own smoke.

Since the mysterious vanishing of *Smoke Signals* I have continued to write. I took a beginners' creative writing workshop (ENG 207) with Kim Edwards, the author of the New York Times Bestseller *The Memory Keeper's Daughter*, and produced two lengthier short stories (ten-twelve pages each): *Running Shoes* and *Uprooting*, neither of which have seen the outside of that classroom. Currently, I partake in an advanced creative writing workshop (ENG 507) with Professor Gurney Norman. I have not published since my first submission to JAR, but I submitted an independently written piece, *Wild Violets*, in a short-story competition sponsored by the Lexington's Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning.

Overall, I have been disappointed by the lack of publishing opportunities in the Lexington and UK community. While I was aware of this literary need, I was hesitant to take the problem on, because I considered myself a *writer*, not a publisher. The solution slapped me in the face one day when I was walking to class and took special notice of the students entering the classroom building stooping over to pick up a copy of *The Kentucky Kernel*, UK's free newspaper. Whether the *Kernel's* appeal lies in breaking campus news coverage, sports commentary, or the sudoku students can discreetly enjoy during lectures, the fact remains that by the end of the day not a single newspaper remains in the bin.

So I got to thinking...what if there was a literature-based paper that published student work (ie. short-stories, poetry, creative non-fiction, artwork, etc.) and could be given out freely alongside *The Kernel*? A litpaper, open for submissions, published at the first of every month, featuring the pieces of beginning creative writers. The idea struck me. Every undergraduate that takes the creative writing courses (ENG 207, 407, 507) produces a significant number of short-stories and/or poetry that has no outlet for publication. This would provide them the opportunity to share their work with the entire campus. The more I thought about it the more I convinced myself such an endeavor would be a success.

Researching further, I came across *Limestone*, the literary journal published by graduates in UK's English Department. I met with Leah Bayens, the Editor-in-Chief for *Limestone*, who was very receptive to the idea. Her help thus far has proved indispensable. Although the staff at *The Kentucky Kernel* proved to be less eager, I was able to meet with Andrew Battista, creator of *The Colonel*, a satirical newspaper on campus. He informed me of the *Danville Advocate Messenger*, the printing press that produces *The Colonel*, and possibly my future litpaper. The next step is to gather a staff to work with me on the publication. I gave a pitch at the first meeting of Friends of English and Linguistics, a newly formed networking group for those interested in the literary subjects. I received positive feedback from many of the members and have set up a preliminary meeting for any who are interested in becoming an integral part of this undertaking (Thursday, October 2, 2008; 7:00pm; 228 Student Center).

The goal? *The Cat's Figment*: UK's first monthly undergraduate litpaper!

II. Purpose

The purpose of *The Cat's Figment* is the establishment of a free monthly literary-based publication for the University of Kentucky's campus featuring the work (short-stories, poetry, visual art, and creative non-fiction including essays, memoir, narrative, etc.) of undergraduate and graduate students, as well as professors and guest contributors from the Lexington community. *The Cat's Figment* will be published at the first of every month; the submissions deadline the first of the month prior (ie. submissions due by November 1, publication out on December 1. Writing submitted after November 1 will be 'rolling': considered for the following issue.)

III. Schedule

- October 2** -Preliminary Meeting, 7:00 pm, Student Center Room 228
- October 17** -Official Registration Complete (UK Student Organization paperwork)
 - Bank Account Set-Up (grants applications submitted, fundraising)
 - Workspace established (hardcopy submissions)
 - Equipment acquired (computers, software)
 - Website Up/Cat's Figment email address (electronic submissions)
- November 1** -Deadline for Submissions (for the December 1 publication) and Advertisement
- November 14** -Final Selection of Works by Editors
- November 28** -Final Layout Design
 - Printing
- December 1** -First Publication and Delivery

IV. Separation of Powers

- Editor-in-Chief:** manages entire staff, oversees funding, submissions, editing, design, publication, advertisement, website, community involvement, etc.
- Faculty Advisor:** advises staff on editing, design, and publication; reviews final selections.
- Managing Editor (Short-Story):** manages and solicits short-story submissions, contacts and meets with writers selected for publication, proposes editing corrections/changes to writer before publication.
- Managing Editor (Poetry):** manages and solicits poetry submissions, contacts and meets with poets selected for publication, proposes editing corrections/changes to poet before publication.
- Managing Editor (Non-fiction):** manages and solicits non-fiction submissions, contacts and meets with writers selected for publication, proposes editing corrections/changes to writer before publication.
- Managing Editor (Art):** manages and solicits visual artwork, contacts and meets with artists (painters, sketch artists, photographers, etc), matches images with literary components.

-Design Editor (Layout): manages and edits layout of litpaper (combining text and images together) with Indesign software for publication.

-Web Editor (Online): manages and designs *Cat's Figment* website.

-Staff Editors: general readers and editors of literary submissions.

-Advertising Coordinator: manages advertisement component of publication, selling and implementing into the design layout.

-Funding Coordinator: leads funding events, acting treasurer, banking deposits and withdrawals from publication's account.

-Community Coordinator: leads community related events (fundraising, promotions, etc.), manages distribution of publication.

V. Budget

-Grants

-Honors Program: Independent Project Grant; Student Skills Development Award

-Student Government Grant

-Eureka: Undergraduate Research Grant

-Gaines Center for the Humanities Grant (?)

-UK Departments: English, Journalism, Art, Arts & Sciences

-Campus Progress Grant

-KY Humanities Board

-Fundraising

-Fiction/poetry reading and coffee in the Cat's Den for donations.

-Advertisement

-Booksellers: Joseph Beth, Barnes & Noble, Half Books, Kennedy's, UK Bookstore, etc.

-Coffee Shops: Starbucks, Coffea, etc.

VII. Potential Jurors

-Travis Watters; Senior Gaines Mentor

-Jan Isenhour; Director of Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning

-Leah Bayens; UK English Graduate Student, previous editor-in-chief of *Limestone*.

VIII. Sources

-Carnegie Center: <http://www.carnegieliteracy.org>

-Danville Advocate Messenger: <http://www.amnews.com/>

-Kentucky Kernel: <http://kykernel.com/>

-Limestone: <http://www.uky.edu/AS/English/Limestone/>