Publishing with undergraduates: Some further observations

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This paper provides some additional observations on publishing with undergraduates following the short paper by Hartley (2014) in a previous issue of Psychology Teaching Review. *This paper's main focus relates to how students can develop as scholars by lecturers actively encouraging students to disseminate their written and oral undergraduate work to wider audiences via many different outlets (e.g. journal papers, magazine articles, trade press articles, conference papers, etc.). Examples are provided.*

Introduction

IN A PREVIOUS ISSUE OF *Psychology Teaching Review*, Hartley (2014) described his own experiences of jointly publishing work with undergraduate students, along with some advantages and disadvantages. As someone who regularly publishes with undergraduates, this paper briefly provides a personal account of the practices I use to aid students in disseminating their work. In fact, since I publish so many papers with my students, I developed guidelines for publishing with undergraduate students that were published in a previous issue of *Psychology Teaching Review* (see Griffiths, 2011).

Background

Ever since I started out as a psychology lecturer I have actively helped students to publish their work if I felt it was good enough to be read by a wider audience. As a third year undergraduate, I was fortunate enough to get a number of papers (and a book chapter) published from my own third year undergraduate empirical project. This almost certainly shaped my own attitude towards undergraduate publishing. My own project supervisor (Dr Peter Davies, then at the University of Bradford) believed that my undergraduate thesis was good enough to get published. When he first told me that, I developed such confidence that it began me on the road to what many would describe as a prolific publisher of papers (I've now published over 500 refereed journal papers,

120 book chapters, four books and well over a 1000 other articles).

I now view any work done by good undergraduates as having potential for further dissemination although the most likely piece is the final year empirical research project. My aim is always to get as many of my students published as possible. While perhaps best-case scenario, students get published in refereed journals, getting published in other publications can do much to build student confidence and spark their interest in publishing their research (in fact my first published work was a short opinion piece in the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society* on graduate career choice a month after I had graduated – see Griffiths [1987]).

Students are an amazing resource and can be incredibly scholarly. By the time they are in their final year of undergraduate study, many of them are motivated and determined to succeed via their written and/or oral work.

The remainder of this short paper describes the practical strategies and processes I have used over the last 25 years in getting students to publish their undergraduate work based on my research-informed teaching. The paper will use real examples and is based on articles that I have published on this topic of getting students to disseminate their undergraduate work to wider audiences (e.g. Griffiths, 2007). Over the last

25 years, 40 of my final year undergraduate projects (see Appendix 1) have published their work in a variety of peer-reviewed outlets (usually relating to my specialist research areas as it is based on my research-informed teaching; see Appendix 1). I have never had a student who was not proud to get their undergraduate work into print.

This paper provides a personal account of the different ways in which third-year undergraduate work can be used as material for potential publication. This can include empirical research (usually carried out as part of a final-year research project) but also coursework on other modules. Through this exercise, students gain insight into the dissemination and publication process and often become more enthusiastic and inclined to pursue publication (as happened in my own case). A side benefit for supervisors and module leaders is that they often enjoy joint publication.

Preparation and support

This is an ongoing personal effort that I employ with students studying in my area of expertise that I feel might have work worthy of being published. As such, my preparation involved becoming intimately familiar with the publication processes of the publications in my area of expertise as well as some that are peripherally related. Although I have not developed specific handouts, interested students are provided with some of my articles on productive writing (see Appendix 2 on 'Resources'). The timescale involved in individual publications varies based upon editorial review processes and the number of issues published per year. Some students may wait 18 months before they see their work in print. For others it is a matter of weeks or months depending on the outlet.

How it works

Every year I sit down with my newly allocated third-year project students and discuss the impending research process with them. The number of students I am allocated ranges from about three to 10 across a number of Psychology programmes. I ask them to tell me what they think signifies the end of the research process. All of them basically respond with a variation on the phrases *'the day I hand my project in'* or *'when I get my project mark back'.*

I then get students to imagine they have done a really excellent piece of empirical work that produces a novel and perhaps unexpected finding. I ask them again what they think signifies the end of the research process. For the more astute students – and possibly those who may end up doing better projects – the penny starts to drop. They start to say things like *'tell everyone I know what I have found'*, *'present the findings at a conference'*, *'try to get the paper published in a journal'* or *'ring up the* The Sun*'* (as one student said to me a number of years ago). I then re-frame what they have said by pointing out that what they are really talking about is dissemination of their work.

I ask them what is the point of spending over half a year on one piece of work only for it to sit in a room gathering dust once it has been assessed? Admittedly, many students probably carry out their projects as a means to an end (i.e. another mark towards their final degree classification). However, some of my students take their research very seriously when I tell them that almost every year I have at least one student who manages to publish their third-year project in a refereed journal.

At that initial meeting with my new third-year students, I let them see a selection of previously published third-year projects. For the keener students this is often very motivating for them. For a small minority (maybe one or two students a year), the aim is no longer to get a high mark but becomes an effort to produce a publishable piece of work. Furthermore, it increases the likelihood they want to do a project in an area of my direct expertise (which is a pleasurable bonus as supervisor). I also show my students published work where the overall project didn't get a particularly good mark (because it wasn't written up as well as it could have

been) but that I re-wrote because the data were good. I even have data from a couple of projects with a lower second class mark that after re-working and re-writing were published! The only difference here is that the student got second (instead of first) authorship. This captures the interest of less confident students who realise that if I think their work has merit, I will help them in getting their work into print.

At every stage of the publication process my students are informed as to what is going on. By this time, almost all of them have left university and have jobs or are on other academic courses so the process is less formal as they are no longer at the university (although a few do go on to do various Master's courses or a PhD). Contact is usually maintained by telephone and email although ex-students who live locally will come in to see me. I pass on all correspondence from the editors and get students to input further if need be (usually concerning revisions). It is always worth it for the small number of students who get their work published.

Other types of student work that can be disseminated

It's also worth adding that third-year empirical projects are not the only source for potential publication. Occasionally, my students have done excellent pieces of coursework and I have (with the student's permission) turned these into standalone articles for newsletters, the gambling trade press, and short articles in professional journals (see Appendix 1). Again, the student (in my own personal experience) is always delighted with the outcome and is a win-win situation for both student and supervisor.

Oral dissemination

It is also worth noting that there is another kind of developmental activity to be encouraged among undergraduate students (i.e. getting my students to present their work at national and international conferences). Most psychology students in the Psychology Division at Nottingham Trent University become adept at giving oral presentations as a lot of their work is assessed in this way. Over the years, many of my undergraduate students have either presented their research at academic conferences. Not all of these necessarily lead to journal publication but most students really value the experience and it again helps them develop scholarly skills.

SPUR initiative

I should also note that my university also operates an initiative called Scholarship Projects for Undergraduate Researchers (SPUR) that allows undergraduates at the end of their second year of studies to become a paid research assistant over the summer period before the start of their final year. One of the expectations of the funded projects is that they produce work that has the potential to be published based on the data collected by the student. I, and my colleague Dr Maria Karanika-Murray, were awarded one of the SPUR grants that has led to two papers being written, one of which that has already been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* (see Appendix 1). Again, the whole process is mutually beneficial for both student and supervisor(s).

Reflection and advice to others

The publishing of student work is subject to all the problems of publishing more generally. There is no guarantee of publication, and even after many revisions the work can still be rejected. However, it is important for students to see the publication process in action (submission, external peer review, referee's comments, editorial decision, manuscript revisions, revised submissions, etc.). Even if students are not published, the learning that takes place in the process is inevitably valuable. Students are very trusting as to where their work could be published and we are often given 'carte blanche' to do what we want with their work. We owe it to our students to get the best possible result for them that we can in the publication process.

Next steps

Given my own success in the area of student publication, I will continue to use it and suggest other psychology lecturers consider doing the same. To get one student a year published is an admirable goal and is something that (on average) I have already achieved. Hopefully, disseminating my story here may inspire other university lecturers to do the same.

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References

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Griffiths, M.D. (2007). Encouraging undergraduate student publishing. *Higher Education Academy Psychology Network Newsletter, 41*, 3.

Griffiths, M.D. (2011). Publishing undergraduate and postgraduate student work: Some guidelines and protocols. *Psychology Teaching Review, 17*(1), 78–80.

Hartley, J. (2014). Publishing with undergraduates. *Psychology Teaching Review, 20*(2), 158–160.

Appendix 1: Examples of student publications (Students' names in bold).

Here is a selection of undergraduate students' published outputs. This includes: (i) refereed papers where I was project supervisor; (ii) refereed papers where one of my colleagues was project supervisor but I helped them pursue publication; (iii) refereed papers where I acted as an external advisor to a student at another university; and (iv) non-refereed papers and articles. A full list of all outputs that I have co-published with undergraduates is available on request.

Selected refereed papers where I was project supervisor or co-supervisor (N=30 in total):
- **Cole, H.** & Griffiths, M.D. (2007). Social interactions in Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing gamers. *CyberPsychology and Behavior, 10*, 575–583.
- **Mehroof, M.** & Griffiths, M.D. (2010). Online gaming addiction: The role of sensation seeking, self-control, neuroticism, aggression, state anxiety and trait anxiety. *CyberPsychology and Behavior, 13*, 313–316.
- Karanika-Murray, M., **Duncan, N.**, Pontes, H. & Griffiths, M.D. (2015). I belong therefore I am: An empirical investigation of work engagement, organisational identification and job satisfaction. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, in press. **[SPUR project]**

Selected refereed papers where one of my colleagues was project supervisor but I helped the student and project supervisor pursue publication (N=10 in total):
- **Niemz, K.**, Griffiths, M.D., Banyard, P. (2005). Prevalence of pathological Internet use among university students and correlations with self-esteem, GHQ and disinhibition. *CyberPsychology and Behavior, 8*, 562–570.
- **Davenport, K.**, Houston, J. & Griffiths, M.D. (2012). Excessive eating and compulsive buying behaviours in women: An empirical pilot study examining reward sensitivity, anxiety, impulsivity, self-esteem and social desirability. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 10*, 474–489.

Selected book chapters, non-refereed papers, or articles (N=7 in total):
- **Stanbury, A.** & Griffiths, M.D. (2007). Obsessive love as an addiction. *Psychology Review, 12*(3), 2–4.
- **Greenhill, R.** & Griffiths, M.D. (2014). The use of online asynchronous interviews in the study of paraphilias. *Sage Research Methods Cases.* Located at: http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/978144627305013508526

Appendix 2: Resources given to my students to help them think about publishing their undergraduate work.

- Griffiths, M.D. (1993). Productive writing. *The New Academic, 3*, 29–30.
- Griffiths, M.D. (1994). Productive writing in the education system. *The Psychologist: Bulletin of the British Psychological Society, 7*, 460–462.
- Griffiths, M.D. (1999). Other publication outlets: Is there life after refereed journals? In P. Hills (Ed.), *Publish or perish* (pp.117–130). Dereham: Peter Francis Publishing.
- Griffiths, M.D. (2000). Writing and getting published – My top 10 tips. *PsyPAG Quarterly, 34*, 2–4.
- Griffiths, M.D. (2001). Ideas for articles and how to get them. *PsyPAG Quarterly, 39*, 34–36.
- Griffiths, M.D. (2004). Tips on…Report writing. *British Medical Journal (Careers), 328*, 28.