

“From Sociology Dissertation to Book”  
Professional Workshop, ASA 2009  
San Francisco, CA

Workshop Leaders:

- 1) Miriam Greenberg: Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of California, Santa Cruz, author of *Branding New York: How a City in Crisis Was Sold to the World* (Routledge, 2008)
- 2) Scott Melzer: Assistant Professor of Sociology, Albion College, author of *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War* (New York University Press, 2009)
- 3) Carolina Bank-Muñoz: Associate Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College, author of *Transnational Tortillas: Race, Gender, and Shop-Floor Politics in Mexico and the United States* (Cornell University Press, 2008)
- 4) Naomi Schneider: Executive Editor, University of California Press

### **Sample Timeline: From Sociology Dissertation to Book**

ASA 2009, San Francisco

Below is a sample timeline for someone who has finished the Ph.D. and is starting a new position Fall, 2009. Our intent is to provide prospective authors with a general sense of how the process will unfold and how long it will take. Please note, though, that these are rough estimates and there is tremendous variation in individuals' experiences and some variation by press. Your own personal and other professional obligations may shorten or lengthen the timeline.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| August, 2014:              | Book is published  |
| March, 2014:               | Read page proofs and construct an index  |
| January, 2014:             | Submit responses to copyedited manuscript  |
| November, 2013:            | Review publisher's copyedits   |
| September, 2013:           | Submit completed manuscript  |
| 2012 – 2013:               | Edit manuscript, submit for review, work on revisions (repeat as necessary)  |
| May, 2012:                 | Negotiate and sign a contract  |
| January, 2012:             | Submit work to presses for internal/external review (note: some presses will require a complete manuscript, others an extended prospectus and a couple of sample chapters) |
| August, 2011:              | Meet with acquisitions editors   |
| June, 2011:                | Contact acquisitions editors, submit prospectus, set up meetings at ASA  |
| Before contacting presses: |  |
| 2010 – 2011:               | Research potential presses, write a prospectus, edit chapters and solicit feedback from colleagues   |
| 2009 – 2010:               | Tenure clock begins along with new position: teaching, service, other research projects will inhibit book progress   |
| August, 2009:              | Attend ASA 2009 session, "From Sociology Dissertation to Book"   |
| June, 2009:                | Finish dissertation  |

## From Sociology Dissertation to Book: Writing a Prospectus

Carolina Bank-Muñoz and Scott Melzer

- I. Approach the prospectus like a job market search
  - A. If you have a connection, use it! (If not, cold-emailing editors is fine)
  - B. Research press websites like you would C&Us posting job ads—what they do, your book's fit, what your book would add, what they want submitted (see “for authors” section on press websites)
  - C. Create a skeleton outline of prospectus for all presses, then individualize it for each press
  - D. As you write, remember that the decision-makers aren't fellow sociologists

## II. Prospectus Specifics

- A. Length: 4-6 pages
- B. Content (note: there are different ways to incorporate the parts below... this isn't an outline):
  1. Snappy title
  2. Thesis/point of book—why should we care?
  3. A sense of the puzzle and answer to the puzzle
  4. Research methods
  5. Literature it's contributing to
  5. Competing similar books and why yours is unique
  7. Chapter outline/summary
  8. Manuscript specifics: word count (100,000 is standard max), illustrations, images
  9. Note what's been published, is/will be submitted elsewhere (articles, book chapters)
  10. Target audience(s)—trade, under/grad, sub/disciplines, courses
  11. Degree of completion of project—where are you now/when will you be done?
  12. Your contact information

C. Suggestions

1. Put your best foot forward first—what's the most compelling reason to publish your book? (many different reasons: theoretical contribution, unique data, hot topic, etc)
2. Limit jargon
3. Make it appealing to a wide audience!
4. Don't worry too much about organization of the book at this point

D. Get feedback before submitting

1. Disciplinary colleagues (especially those who've authored books)
2. Non-disciplinary colleagues (same as above; and especially those in disciplines your book targets)
3. Non-academics (to ensure it's clear, jargon-free, broadly appealing)

## From Sociology Dissertation to Book: Editing the Dissertation

Miriam Greenberg, UCSC; ASA Professional Workshop, August 9, 2009

### A. Phase 1. From Book to Dissertation: Envision the Final Product

How—within the requirements of your institution—to write a ‘book-like’ dissertation

1. Communicate clearly with dissertation advisors about desire to write a book-like dissertation rather than a monograph. Rationales: changing realities of book publishing plus mounting expectations for junior faculty to publish.
2. Editing begins with shooting.’ Make as many decisions in the process of writing that will smooth the transition to book, eg: pre-establish the length of chapters; shorten paragraphs and sentences; limit jargon—and be *consistent*.
3. Establish an ‘authorial voice.’ Imagine yourself author first, grad student second. Remember that you are telling a story, not just making a case.
4. Take advantage of the dissertation defense for feedback about book publishing.

### B. Phase II. From Dissertation to Book: Genre Translation

How to *translate* (rather than simply edit) your completed dissertation into a more accessible genre before sending to publishers. (However well ‘A’ was accomplished)

1. Language and authorial voice. Additionally limit/eliminate jargon and material geared to particular advisors and subsets of the literature (the ‘advisor x section,’ the heavily footnoted theory prologue to every chapter’ etc.) Be confident about stating your own original ideas! Consider telling stories and using opening anecdotes to anchor more abstract arguments.
2. Structure: Consider additional strategies to make your more readable and accessible for those outside your field (potentially the majority of your audience), as well as for the media (who will only skim) : Use a prologue for the book, as well as at the start of chapters, to draw in readers. Use simple chapter, subsection, and section titles to help readers navigate. Further minimize footnotes/endnotes. Create 1-2 exemplary chapters, as particular chapters may ultimately have to stand alone to be used in classrooms, be reproduced in edited volumes, or to be recycled as publisher-created digital versions.
3. Use of theory: Highlight, clarify, and focus the theory (rather than eliminate it) and consider carefully how it is integrated within the text. .
4. Professional quality images & figures: If necessary, consider requesting funds from your publisher or institution (a “subvention”) to cover graphics.

### C. Phase III. From the Book to the Beyond: How to Wrap Up and Move On...

1. Writing the response to readers: use reviewers comments as an opportunity to translate your work for a wider audience, and respond extensively and in detail about how you will take them into consideration in revision (when appropriate)
2. Streamline final edit process. Ask for an indexer (or request subvention if not available.) Be as efficient as humanly possible. Be cordial and responsive with editor. Ask friends and family to read for extra editorial eyes.
3. Marketing and press coverage, reviews, awards, digital formats, and taking it on the road. If you want the book read, you’ll have to play a big role. Work collaboratively with the marketing division of your press—it’s a shared mission!

## **Guidelines for writing and publishing your first book** (from Naomi Schneider)

- 1) DO take on a book subject of real importance and breadth.
- 2) Do make a first pass at revising the dissertation before contacting a publisher. You will increase your chances of the manuscript being formally considered for publication if you make an effort to revise it before approaching an editor. Editors commonly complain that dissertations contain: too much jargon, long literature reviews, weakly-articulated theses, not enough attention to narrative flow.
- 3) DO write your book for an audience of general, educated lay readers. (We call this the Upper West Side crowd.) It's necessary to write more boldly and more engagingly in a book than in your dissertation. Reread some of your favorites books—fiction and nonfiction—and try to emulate the style of successful writers.
- 4) DO utilize important contacts (adviser, dissertation chair) in making an initial contact with a publisher but don't overdo it. Your adviser's support might help you get an editor to read your proposal seriously but your mentor can't insure acceptance of the ms..
- 5) DO research the best publishers for your own book. Look up who has published books you admire and works in your field. Make sure to find the correct names and addresses of editors at publishing houses. Start off with approaching your top two or three publishers.
- 6) DO contact a publisher in a professional manner. Generally I still like to get hard copies of proposals that contain an overview of the book project, a table of contents, a brief discussion of where this books fits within the existing literature (i.e., what makes this book new and noteworthy), a sense of the market for the book and a sample chapter or two.

7) DO realize that some editors will not consider a first manuscript (send it out for review, etc.) if it is submitted to more than one publisher. Most editors will only contract a first book project on the basis of a full manuscript (that the author has made an effort to revise, at least partially, before approaching the publisher). Also realize that contractual terms will be modest and are fairly standard for a first book.

8) DO not lose hope if your book project gets rejected from a publisher. Sometimes I have to turn down a book project just because I have too much on my plate; there are many university presses and publishing options out there.

9) DO read guidebooks in this area that might be helpful, including *Revising Your Dissertation: Advice from Leading Editors*, edited by Beth Luey (California, 2004) and *From Dissertation to Book*, by William Germano (Chicago, 2005).

## **General Rules for Revising Your Dissertation** (from Naomi Schneider)

∞ Eliminate and/or minimize review of literature and theory (especially in the first chapter!). A book manuscript is not for your dissertation committee; it's for your colleagues, who have done their homework and will do you the courtesy of assuming that you have also. It's also for general readers and students, who--if they want to read more--can refer to your bibliography and/or notes.

∞ Reviewing and previewing. This is the true mark of a dissertation, and needs to be eliminated! † Do not begin each chapter and/or major section by announcing what you are about to say, or reviewing at the end of each chapter what you have just said (ie, In the following chapter/section I will show x, y, and z; or In the previous chapter I showed a, b, c). Don't forecast what you're going to say, just say it!

∞ Readability. The strictures surrounding dissertation writing seldom produce readable writing. Stuffy phrases, passive voice, attribution, and polysyllable jargon are roadblocks in the path of readership. Read it aloud. Does it sing or sag? Will it fly with Joe and Jane on the street? Your goal with this book is NOT to sound as smart as possible, but to have your book read as ACCESSIBLY as possible (while still delivering the material in a smart fashion).

∞ Footnotes. Dissertation writers, afraid that their judgment carries no weight, are apt to footnote almost every statement. But the author of a book must accept responsibility. Delete half your footnotes. Cut them down in both number and in size. A book that is too long, or weighted down with excess documentation, will not be publishable.

∞ Completely rewrite your Introduction from scratch so it's more like a book and less like a dissertation. You need to draw the reader in. Tell a story; use real-life examples to capture the reader's interest. Don't make your book about data and theory, make it about people and events!

∞ Cut the number of subheadings/subsections in the book. Ditto for your Table of Contents. † Subheads give an 'outlining feel'--it shows that you know how to outline or write a brief, but for most books the outline should disappear into the fluidity of a context. The book should flow; it should not hop from stone to stone.

∞ Bibliography. Having cited everybody who has written anything pertinent, the dissertation writer gathers them into a list and calls it a bibliography. But a useful bibliography must do more than alphabetize footnotes. A judicious bibliographical essay, grouping major references into sections according to their importance to your topic, can be part of what readers will pay for when they buy your book.

∞ Too much? When beginning writers don't know quite how to make their points--when they are teaching themselves the techniques of writing as they compose their



material--they are apt to fumble a great deal, and the result is wordage by the yard. They don't know when to stop or how to move on. Re-examine your dissertation critically--others will. Ruthlessly cut out the flab, and pay special attention to repetition. Don't depend upon the editor to do this. A flabby manuscript may never survive to get into the editor's hands. Read questionable passages aloud. If they sound stilted or obscure, they probably are.

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From the Chronicle of Higher Education dated June 13, 2003

If Dissertations Could Talk, What Would They Say?

By WILLIAM GERMANO

You open a young scholar's first book, the one based on his doctoral thesis.

You begin in earnest. Your intentions are the best. But before long, you're flipping ahead to see just how many pages there are. It's a diversion tactic, and you know it. The maneuver only postpones the inevitable realization --†neither your heart nor the author's is really in this.

Why are dissertations, the firstborn of the academic tribe, so dull? What does it mean when the best minds can create book-length work that commands so little interest? The answer, as we all know, is that dullness is safe.

The dullness question, which Pope might have skewered in an elegant couplet, is one I've fumbled over in the course of writing a book about revising the doctoral dissertation. A bodice-ripper, you're thinking. But if you believe, as I do, that academics are having a hard time figuring out what they're supposed to be doing these days, the doctoral thesis can't not be an interesting place to look for trouble.

A professor I spoke to recently called the dissertation "a paranoid genre," and rightly so. The manuscript you produce as a degree requirement needs to demonstrate that you know the history of your field, that you have propitiated various deities, that you've found the right giant on whose shoulders you can climb and wave your tiny hat. Maybe that isn't paranoia quite, but it's at least a conservatism born of fear. The result is that many a dissertation inters its subject when it should be bringing it to light instead.

There are some signs of change out there, but they're not without problems. "I'm writing my dissertation as a book," a Ph.D. candidate reports confidently. Publishers are hearing that more and more often, but we remain skeptical. A dissertation isn't "already a book." At best it's a book-length manuscript, and confusing a dissertation with a book is the source of most of the unhappiness that new Ph.D.'s face as they gear up for publication.

Practically every dissertation sags beneath prose that no one would read if they didn't have to --†and so they don't. Many social scientists persist in believing that providing a reference in the middle of a sentence is exactly what the reader wants. Who ever yearned for [Simpson, 1999] smack in the middle of a carefully argued idea? When did the citation outweigh the thought formation that caused it in the first place?

Scholars in the humanities are just as likely to pursue the dream of objectivity to its anesthetizing extreme. Consider the astounding overuse of the passive voice, which not only eradicats the author but sucks the remaining life out of the author's prose. It would seem that many a young scholar in history, to choose one field, has been urged to produce chapters 60 pages long or longer. Outsized chapters may be impressive in a dissertation, but they become a trial for a voluntary reader. Other writing sins beset the dissertation, all of which are there, it seems, to add a patina of professionalism to the young scholar's work. Such exercises don't build book-writing skills.

A dissertation fulfills an academic requirement; a book fulfills a desire to speak broadly. A dissertation rehearses scholarship in the field; a book has absorbed that scholarship. A dissertation can be as long as the author likes; a book's length is strategically arranged for optimal marketability. A dissertation suppresses an authorial voice; a book creates and sustains one. A dissertation's structure demonstrates the author's analytic skills; a book's structure demonstrates the author's command of extended narrative. A dissertation stops; a book concludes.

Most crucially, a dissertation is written for a committee (that powerful audience of three or four), a book for the world. Yours might be a small world, like the total population of specialists in Etruscan inscriptions, but it's a population that extends beyond the folks you know personally and on into the future. If you want to be made nervous, don't think about what your dissertation director will say when the book version comes out; think instead that, if you're very lucky, someone will be dusting off your work after you're dead.

The fault within the genre can't be disentangled from the institution that summons the genre into being to begin with. Too many manuscripts are produced by having the author find the smallest corner of the field and burrow in --†and do so in the discipline's very special dissertationese. Why encourage a doctoral student in literature, for example, to produce yet one more manuscript that nudges forward some sort of theory in the big opening number, followed by four or five chapters, each of which is a close reading of a single text, purportedly reinforcing what was proposed at the start? If the dissertation is true to form, there won't even be a concluding chapter. When the last reading is finished, the work is declared complete. If you're writing such a dissertation, you'll have a hard time publishing it. If you're advising someone's dissertation and it looks like that, don't expect to see it on the shelves at the Harvard Book Store.

There is of course the other view: The purpose of the dissertation is to demonstrate the analytic skills necessary for professional-level work, rather than to produce such work. Fair enough, but in a job market as competitive as today's is, what new Ph.D. wants to be told that her doctoral work is merely promising? If I can judge from my editorial desk, that Ph.D. is being told to do something concrete with her dissertation, and to do it fast.

A lot of dissertations think they're specialized when they aren't even that. To be specialized in the good sense means to have a nugget vital to a small population of scholars. Many a thesis doesn't break any ground at all, not even a small and distant patch. The typical dissertation achieves its majority by subjugating a vast and unwieldy critical literature. That variety of doctoral thesis --†the product of hundreds and hundreds of previously published artifacts --†is often no more than a great big book report. Too long. Too exquisitely secondary to the big cheeses of the discipline. Too tentative. There may be something of value in there, but it would take a lot of work to find it, and the stamina and time required --†by publishers, by other scholars, by potential purchasers --†just isn't there. No publisher can afford to add such books to its list because no one wants to buy them. And libraries, on whom we have all depended for decades, are no longer supported to provide that service.

There has to be a balance between the ends of scholarship and the market for books. Scholarship is about tiny discoveries and corrections. Just before he went and made Oprah angry, Jonathan Franzen wrote quite a good novel in which the idea of corrections (a word that under a little pressure nicely yields a lot) came to stand, ironically and not so, for life's small and great changes. When a scholar breaks even a modest patch of ground, a correction can take place. But it may take time to get the news out in a printed book, at least under the current economic rules. Small scholarly achievements may soon be consigned to electronic files only. The big books take care of themselves. But think about getting published right now, and you'll see that the broad middle --†where most scholarship is written up --†has become a scary place.

Like any good scholarly problem, this one can happily be described as complex. But the heart of the matter is simpler: Many dissertations fail because they're badly written, even as works of scholarship. Graduate students and recent Ph.D.'s have reminded me often enough that there are two things they're not taught and yet are expected to be able to do. (Time's up. The correct answers are: teach and write.)

Every graduate student needs and deserves instruction in writing an article for publication, instruction in planning a thesis that someone other than a committee might care about, instruction in how to maneuver quickly and safely through book publishing's hoops, instruction in how to revise one's work five times, not get sick of it, and understand that the result is worth every grindingly tedious moment spent. There are more attempts to provide those tools than there were 20 years ago, but the university has a long way to go and not much time to get there. Every graduate

department or program, as well as every graduate-school administration, should be taking those fundamental tasks and building them into their core programs.

Most dissertations are dry as toast and not as tasty, but it would be unfair to suggest that there aren't exceptions. Some brilliant --†or maybe just cagey --†young scholars have been writing work that's book quality or near book quality while still graduate students. You may be able to name some in your field. What separates the sheep from the sheep dip is most often a command of writing itself.

The manuscript that an editor wants to see on her desk is one she can't not read. We're inundated by work that is trying, painfully, to sound grown-up, when what we most want is work that conveys genuine belief. But belief in what? Not in the validity of a theory or the judiciousness of a political view, though that might be what gets the author out of bed in the morning. More fundamental than either is a belief in writing's power: belief in the story within the manuscript, in the existence of an interested audience, in the author's ability to reach those readers.

A real book manuscript doesn't look over its shoulder, worrying that Foucault is running after it in a hockey mask. It has the confidence not to tell everything, like a tedious old uncle at a family reunion, but instead chooses which part of the story to tell even while knowing much, much more. Most important, a book manuscript doesn't suppress the author's commitment to the subject. That commitment might even be love.

If dissertations could talk, most would mumble a few words and expire. I can hear a self-punishing academic responding, "Of course, I'll save writing well for the trade book I hope to finish up one day." But why should that scholar be deprived of writing as well as she or he can right now, whether in a chapter or the humblest of monographs? If I sound impatient with the unexamined conventions of academes, it's because I see, every day, the work of scholars who want to bring what they're excited about to readers in their fields and beyond. Those authors, especially those of the rising generation, need the encouragement that only the rest of the academic community --†fellow scholars, department chairs, journal editors, book publishers, readers --†can provide. However modest the patch of scholarly ground --†the story of a brave little phoneme, anyone? --†there are worse and also better ways to write, ways to tell not everything you know, but everything the reader needs to hear from you and in your words.

William Germano, vice president and publishing director at Routledge, is the author of *Getting It Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious About Serious Books* (University of Chicago Press, 2001). His new book, on what to do with your dissertation, will be published next year by U Chicago Press.

## List of University Presses in Sociology

### First-Tier University Presses (my own subjective opinion—often varies from field to field)

University of California Press  
Cambridge University Press  
Cornell University Press  
Oxford University Press  
Johns Hopkins University Press  
Princeton University Press  
University of Chicago Press  
Harvard University Press  
Yale University Press  
University of North Carolina Press  
Duke University Press  
University of Minnesota Press  
New York University Press (on the cusp between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>)

### Second-Tier University Presses

(solid for tenure purposes, but don't expect much in the way of marketing or sales)<sup>1</sup>

Columbia University Press  
Rutgers University Press  
Indiana University Press  
University of Massachusetts Press  
University of Illinois Press  
University of Michigan Press  
SAGE Press  
Stanford University Press  
Temple University Press  
University of Kansas Press  
University of Virginia Press  
University of Pennsylvania Press  
Rutgers University Press  
SUNY Press

### Respected Commercial Academic Press

W.W. Norton & Co.  
Berghahn (for European topics, esp. German ones)  
Hill & Wang (highly respected in American history)  
Routledge (highly respected in postcolonial studies, cultural studies, etc.)  
Blackwell (strong in urban and cultural studies)  
Palgrave Macmillan (one of the better “dissertation mills”—at least books are copyedited!)  
The New Press (lefty)  
Verso (very left)

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<sup>1</sup> Mostly drawn from Brendan O'Malley, Doctoral Candidate in the History Department at the CUNY Grad Center. Carolina Bank Muñoz has tailored it to Sociology.

## **Key References: From Sociology Dissertation to Book**

ASA 2009, San Francisco

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Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing: A series from the University of Chicago Press (<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Complete/Series/CGWEP.html>)