

# West Chester University's Graduate Certificate in Publishing

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**Abstract** West Chester University (WCU)'s Graduate Certificate in Publishing derives its strength from its interdisciplinary design. Besides being informed by professional and technical writing scholarship and pedagogy, the program draws foundationally from book, media, and publishing studies and features MBA and design courses as well. Its book/media component takes its cue from the many well-developed United Kingdom (UK) and European university publishing and editing programs, while its inclusion of highly ranked MBA courses reflects key skills and knowledge the industry typically desires for those working in editorial and production divisions. Similarly, the art electives aim to equip graduates with a deeper understanding of the elements and importance of the graphic arts and design in marketing as well as editorial management.

WCU's 18-credit program provides high-quality preparation for diverse publishing and related new media careers. By examining the shifts in writing, reading, and publishing over the centuries, students gain multifaceted knowledge of publishing history and media transformations and, consequently, are better able to navigate today's ever-changing publishing and media worlds through a more-informed perspective. It is the only program in the area to do so. The publishing program equips students with a well-rounded, hands-on understanding of contemporary publishing and digital media. This article details the program's underlying rationale, showcases its components, and offers advice.

**Keywords** publishing studies, book history and media studies, editing, academic rigor with professional training, interdisciplinary design.

Launched in 2017, West Chester University (WCU)'s Graduate Certificate in Publishing derives its strength from its interdisciplinary design. In addition to being informed by professional and technical writing scholarship and pedagogy, the program draws foundationally from book, media, and publishing studies and features MBA and design courses. Its book/media component takes its cue from the many well-developed United Kingdom (UK) and European university publishing and editing programs, while its inclusion

of courses from a highly ranked MBA program reflects key skills and knowledge the industry typically desires for those working in editorial and production divisions. Similarly, the art electives aim to equip graduates with a deeper understanding of the elements and importance of the graphic arts and design in marketing as well as editorial management.

## **Influences on the Program's Design**

The certificate's roots extend further back than 2017. A key influence was the University of Pennsylvania's 1979 Institute of Editing and Publishing, designed and taught by Professor Paul Korshin. Korshin modeled his institute, in part, after the storied Radcliffe Publishing Course, but he also drew from his work with editing and the long eighteenth-century's media and publishing transformations. His program interwove various history-of-the-book topics and hands-on activities, from the making of handmade paper to printing practices and more. Years later, the 1992 establishment of the scholarly organization Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP) brought together publishing professionals and scholars from diverse disciplines, all of whose work collectively covered oral, manuscript, print, and digital cultures. The exchanges the founder-director (Eleanor Shevlin) of WCU's certificate program had with this group over the years, coupled with the extensive exposure it afforded her to UK and European publishing studies programs, their interdisciplinary content, and modes of operation, convinced her that such programs offered students many more advantages than non-credit-bearing workshops could. The current director, Kristin Kondrlik, shares this interdisciplinary expertise in book history as well as extensive experience in professional writing and editing. These influences and shared backgrounds have resulted in the certificate program's distinctiveness and intellectual richness.

## **Curriculum Development: Programmatic Research Perspectives**

Situating the program's curriculum development within programmatic research lends additional insights about its design and rationale. Literature on publishing programs is still relatively scant, but important studies do exist. Most recently, Holly Baker and others (2024) studied 94 editing and publishing programs to assess what is being taught and whether editing and publishing programs share a curriculum. Their findings indicate not only the absence of a core curriculum across programs but also an imbalance between more ubiquitous content courses such as publishing, literature, and writing and less commonly taught content, such as editing skills and design, that address industry needs (p. 74). That only ten percent of all 1,602 courses that were surveyed teach editing skills (p.

75) underscores this imbalance. The study's concluding recommendations for program administrators and instructors identify four actions that will strengthen editing and publishing programs while simultaneously advancing efforts to create "a recognizable curriculum" common to such degree and certificate programs (p. 77).

When examined alongside these recommendations, WCU's publishing certificate program bears witness to their value. As noted, ideas for WCU's program were influenced by SHARP. This academic society resulted in the founder's establishing close ties with international publishing programs as well as with pedagogical and research work in the field, mirroring both Baker, et al.'s first recommendation—to develop professional relationships with other programs through conferences, research groups, and invited talks—and their second recommendation—to familiarize oneself with course offerings and goals (p. 77). In terms of the second suggestion, reviewing various program curricula extended beyond SHARP. In preparing the program proposal for her university and the state system, the program's founder reviewed course offerings and objectives featured in select US master's and certificate publishing programs but did so with an eye to distinguishing WCU's program rather than a desire to find an established, shared curriculum—a departure from the impetus for Baker, et al.'s study.

Of the remaining two recommendations, the WCU program did not strategize about course titles in the ways urged by Baker et al.'s third recommendation. For one, the program has no control over titles of existing courses offered by the art department or MBA program. Secondly, while the English course titles were intentionally crafted, only one has "editing" in the title even though 25% of our program's courses address copyediting and related editing skills. Yet, syllabi course descriptions, efforts to meet one-on-one with all prospective students, and extensive individualized advising all serve to convey the depth and breadth of WCU's program. Of course, this approach may fall short of conveying the program's content for those scanning only titles in a catalog or website. Moreover, length limits placed on catalog course descriptions hinder fully communicating the content and topics covered, a point Lisa Melonçon acknowledged in her overview of editing courses taught nationally (2019, p. 176–77).

Out of all their recommendations, Baker et al.'s fourth one arguably reveals the most about WCU's program's distinctiveness. Their final point recommends striking a balance among the five content sets they establish by identifying "shared learning objectives" within larger program content categories (p. 60–62): 1) Editing Skills, 2) Publishing, 3) Writing and Literature, 4) Design and Technology, and 5) Industry (p. 77; p. 62). WCU's certificate program incorporates four of the five sets, omitting courses devoted to literature and

writing but generally balancing the other sets. Besides attracting students who already have backgrounds in writing (including creative and technical), literature, or both, and not wanting to duplicate our MA in English's tracks (creative writing; literature; and writing, theory, and criticism), the prime reason for omitting this content set stems from our program's rootedness in book and media history and the influences of similar programs on its design. Christoph Bläsi's (2015) "Publishing studies: Being part of a cultural practice plus X?" further highlights the effects of these influences while enabling a fruitful dialogue with Baker et al.'s research.

Although appearing almost a decade prior, Bläsi's essay shares Baker et al.'s interest in whether publishing studies has the makings of an academic discipline and whether a core set of theories and methods are common to the field (Bläsi, 2015, p. 147–48); both studies discussed what constitutes a discipline. Both studies also concluded that publishing studies is not yet a discipline and that no core curriculum exists. Here the similarities wane. Rather than review courses, Bläsi conducted extensive interviews with UK publishing studies experts and assessed various programs' landscapes (p. 150). The differences in these two studies' research methods, though, is minor when compared to the contrasts (sometimes stark) in conceptions of the field and the disciplines with which the field engages. For one, Bläsi sees the purpose of publishing studies as an academic program in the following way:

To generate and disseminate knowledge (and solutions...) about the current book, its economical and cultural context, in the light of their digital transformations, can probably be seen as the primary objective of Publishing Studies. (p. 149)

While the WCU certificate program does not view this purpose as its prime one, it is a guiding principle that shaped its design. The program is grounded in the belief that by examining the shifts in writing, reading, and publishing over the centuries, students gain multifaceted knowledge of publishing history and media transformations. Consequently, they are better able to navigate today's ever-changing global publishing and media. It is the only program in the area (and possibly the nation) to do so. It is also one reason that our program does not include "editing" in its name and helps explain its departure from some of Baker et al.'s findings about publishing studies programs overall.

Another difference emerges in the disciplines that these two studies associate foremost with publishing studies. Baker et al. identify departments (and, by extension, disciplines) in which publishing studies programs are housed and draw from; specifically, they list "English, creative writing, business writing, linguistics, professional communication,

technical communication, mass communication, and so on” (p. 56), though later, they expand the list to include others after noting that editing and publishing programs “are often, though not exclusively, hosted in English departments (to include such departments as English and Philosophy, English and Creative Writing, English and Writing, and Writing and Literature). E&P programs are also hosted by business, communications, journalism, media and creative arts, publishing, typographic and graphic communications, and linguistics departments” (p. 65). Despite overlaps with their roster of departments and disciplines, Bläsi’s list does not emphasize communication and writing. Instead, he identifies the departments in which such programs are housed as “English, business studies, and information science” (p. 148) and the disciplines from which they draw as “book history, English (and other literary, cultural and also linguistic) studies, media studies, communication studies, business studies and information/library/archival studies” (p. 151).

This difference becomes more prominent when we consider the texts and theorists the two studies each associate with the field. Observing that the field has no core curriculum and that pedagogical approaches to editing instruction are typically situated within writing studies (p. 56), Baker et al. record primarily technical writing and editing textbooks and handbooks. Bläsi, in contrast, presents the main figures that his publishing studies experts called the “core theorists” of the field (p. 151). Rather than those involved primarily in writing studies or technical communication, this roster favors historians, sociologists, philosophers and media theorists as well as scholars of the history, culture, and politics of technology, and a French literary critic.

In short, similarities notwithstanding, Baker et al.’s study and that of Bläsi present two fundamentally different conceptions—ones of kind, not of value—of publishing studies programs. Although the WCU certificate program was in many ways born of book and media history, it also embraces significant elements that adhere to Baker et al.’s view of such programs and the ways they could be strengthened. At the same time, our certificate program’s origins in book and media history have grounded it in an interdisciplinary orbit well accustomed to working across disciplines while maintaining its own identity, combining theory with practice, and collaborating with professionals outside of the academy, including those in publishing, rare books, non-academic libraries, and technology. As Bläsi asserts, “Publishing Studies allow to combine [sic] demanding scholarly questions with the sense of involvement in something relevant” (p. 153), a view that technical and professional communication scholars also share about the field.

A year before Bläsi's article appeared touting publishing studies as marrying academic inquiry with relevant application and problem-solving, John Maxwell (2014) elevated such a view of the field to an intriguing but almost utopian level. Maxwell sees the role of university publishing studies programs as having shifted from being industry-driven as they had been since their emergence in the twentieth century to being a driving force for the industry's revitalization in the twenty-first century:

[H]ere is the value to publishing that a university program can provide: it is not just the individuals trained and released into the workforce, nor the passing down of skills and competencies although these are important; it is rather the active renewal of publishing culture. To do this requires attention to both the past and the future; it requires both continuity over time and ongoing reinvention. This is something that can only be done with an ever-greening supply of new people and a productive, practical, risk-tolerant environment in which to let them grow. It can be difficult to do in a corporate setting, but this is precisely what universities do best. ("A craft tradition," para. 5)

While viewing university publishing studies programs as the mechanism for revitalizing the publishing industry seems grandiose, Maxwell's perspective has merit. WCU's publishing certificate, in fact, was designed to meet the needs of an industry being radically transformed and disrupted by technological change and global consolidation. As Maxwell observes, "The very idea of a stable industry with stable labour requirements is in some question. More to the point, the idea of a stable curriculum, or at least a stable set of core competencies for publishing graduates and would-be employees, is also in question" (Maxwell, 2014, "Publishing education: Perspectives," para. 3). Such uncertainties did not dissuade us from making the teaching of core competencies an integral part of our program from its inception, but they did prompt us to design a curriculum that would equip graduates with substantive understanding of "both the past and the future" (Maxwell, 2014, "A craft tradition," para. 5) through coursework in the history of authorship, reading, and publishing and related media transformations and in all aspects of the contemporary publishing industry. Similarly, the curriculum's research components, class projects, guest lectures, and emphasis on flexibility, nimbleness, and adaptability all aim to create "a productive, practical, risk-tolerant environment" (Maxwell, 2014, "A craft tradition," para. 5) that enables students to enter the industry or related media positions with confidence and well-developed insights about its ever-shifting landscape. Finally, the recruitment of professional and technical writing faculty has further enriched the program,

as they have brought their expertise, incorporating cutting-edge approaches to document design, accessibility, and digital tools.

## **Curriculum and Enrollment Overview**

WCU's resulting 18-credit program provides high-quality preparation for diverse publishing and related new media careers. With courses offered in partnership between WCU's College of Arts and Humanities and College of Business and Public Management, the publishing certificate harnesses the strengths of both colleges to equip students with a well-rounded, hands-on understanding of contemporary publishing and digital media. Enrollment has ranged from five to ten students each academic year, with the program's online modality attracting both in- and out-of-state students. While some enrollees have recently completed undergraduate degrees and are seeking career starts, others are working professionals. Additionally, our master's students are often attracted to the program. Some enroll in the certificate upon acceptance into the degree program; others do so a semester or two into their master's coursework. Creative writing MA students are especially attracted to some of the certificate courses if not the program in its entirety. Because these creative writers are seriously interested in learning about the industry, we have not had the problems that Veronica Thompson (2014) experienced with fellow students pursuing these courses as an employment insurance policy rather than possessing a true interest in their content.

The certificate program consists of six three-credit, online courses: the required English course, *Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures*; a choice of another English course; one of the four approved MBA courses; a design course; either another English or MBA elective; and the required English internship. A hallmark of the certificate program is its attention to individualized advising. The director works closely with each student to select the English, MBA, and design courses and internship that best suit that student's interests and goals.

Overall, courses are delivered asynchronously, except for three synchronous meetings typically held in the required *Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures* course. We intentionally opted for a distance-education delivery format to appeal to working professionals interested in a career change or additional credentials. This format has also proven popular with recent graduates, especially humanities students, seeking to enhance their marketability. Simply put, students can arrange to complete the certificate's coursework to fit their professional and personal schedules. Of course, the online format also allows students from around the country and abroad to pursue the certificate.

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Along with the flexibility provided by online modalities, the program also can be completed in less than a year. This relatively quick path is assisted by the timing of the MBA offerings. The English courses—*Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures*; *Methods and Materials of Publishing*; *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing*; and *Publishing and Media Internship*—run 15 weeks during the academic year and seven weeks during the summer. Yet, the MBA courses—*Components of Effective Leadership, Innovation and Marketing Strategy, Law and Ethics in the Business Environment, and Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation*—always run seven weeks, both in the summer and the academic year, and typically several sections of each are offered in Sessions 1 and 2 of the Fall and Spring semesters. Thus, it is possible to take two or even three courses in a semester.

Students must take one of the English courses before taking any of the MBA courses or the art and design offerings. This requirement ensures that students have a publishing foundation on which to build when taking the non-English courses. In terms of the design course, recent retirements will require future curricular changes. Currently, however, students can complete an additional elective from the MBA or English offerings, or they can transfer in an approved art or design course. The culminating internship can take place entirely remotely or in-person depending on the student's needs and interests. Maintaining and consistently expanding its collaborative relationships with area industries, the certificate program features not only meaningful internship experiences but also a network of connections that foster employment opportunities for its graduates. The program, however, assists any student who wishes to find internship and job placements in other geographic locations.

In addition to flexibility and timely completion, the certificate has also been designed with an eye to the Philadelphia metropolitan area's marketplace needs. Philadelphia remains home to numerous publishing and media firms. Not only are book publishing and related digital media activities among the area's leading economic sectors, but Philadelphia is also still known as the medical publishing capital of the world. This reputation and the region's numerous opportunities in the medical, technical, and professional sectors have prompted the development of our *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing* course. Similarly, components in many of the other courses reference these opportunities when appropriate and relevant. For example, instructors highlight when any textbook discusses an international publishing firm that has regional headquarters in the area—and several do, including Elsevier, Wolters Kluwer, and Taylor & Francis. Moreover, since COVID-19, these firms frequently offer fully remote positions, thus providing opportunities for those

students who do not live in the area and do not wish to relocate. Publishing and media-related jobs also exist within other key economic sectors such as financial services, pharmaceutical industries, and legal operations in the city and its neighboring regions. These employers desire hires who not only have a working familiarity with publishing in its many forms but who are also savvy about the transformations wrought by digital developments. Such industries maintain internal, external, or both types of house organs for their employees, members, or clients. In short, the program's metropolitan area has the industry presence to supply internships and the industry need for employees with the training and skillset the WCU certificate program provides.

## **Coursework**

All publishing certificate students must complete a foundation course in English: *Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures*. Additionally, the certificate requires four electives. Students select at least one elective from each of the following areas: English, business, and production and design. Students also choose an additional elective from either the business or English areas based on their interests and career goals. The internship is the culminating course for those in the program.

### **Foundation Course**

The required *Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures* outlines the history of the production, distribution, circulation, and reception of the written word. It traces how authorship, reading, publishing, and the physical properties of texts have changed over time and examines, both historically and analytically, the intellectual, social, and cultural impact of changing communications technologies against the backdrop of our current digital age. Understanding how and why the many agents and processes influenced the circulation of the written word evolved offers students exceptional preparation for navigating the current publishing landscape and for meeting various communication and media challenges.

The course moves chronologically through the history of the written word, beginning with the history of early writing technologies such as cuneiform, papyrus, and paper, and concluding with discussions of publishing in the digital age. It draws on scholarship from the fields of writing history, book history, periodical studies, and new media theory. In addition to a selection of articles from key journals such as *Book History*, *Victorian Periodical Studies*, and *New Media Studies* and excerpts from David Finkelstein and Alastair McCleery's *Introduction to Book History* (2013), the course draws readings from Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose's *A Companion to the History of the Book* (2019).

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The course operates as a fully distance-education course. However, it features three synchronous sessions, with the rest of the work conducted virtually and asynchronously. Students complete a series of activities to engage with the readings. When the course meets synchronously, students complete a brief activity to prepare for class. These include a keyword assignment, where students define and discuss key concepts in the field of writing history; a manuscript editing assignment; and group presentations on the work of a contemporary book artist. During the other, asynchronous weeks, students rotate through “discussion leader” positions.

In addition to weekly activities, the major course assignment is a seminar paper, with the aim of its serving as either a conference paper or a springboard to a longer, more developed scholarly article on any aspect of manuscript, print, or digital cultures. In the past, students have taken various approaches in tying their work to publishing and editing: some have analyzed the business practices of booksellers such as Barnes and Noble; others have discussed the local Philadelphia publishing scene; others have discussed the work of editing in translation; and still others have examined questions of authorship and circulation. The assignment proceeds via a scaffolded approach. First, students complete a review of an article or book relevant to their potential project. Next, students craft a proposal for professor approval. At the midpoint of the project, students verbally report on their progress report during a meeting with their professor and provide an annotated bibliography. The final essay is submitted for peer and instructor feedback before final submission.

### **Disciplinary Electives in English**

The English elective can be chosen from among three courses: *Methods and Materials of Publishing; Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing*; and the department’s graduate *Special Topics* course.

#### ***Methods and Materials of Publishing***

*Methods and Materials of Publishing* consists of two modules of equal duration. The first module details the twenty-first-century publishing industry. Specifically, it introduces students to the industry’s various sectors, major business trends, the range of editorial roles, diverse authorial options (including self-publishing and commissioning), the function of literary agents, contracts and rights, design and production operations, marketing and publicity, distribution and sales channels. The course’s second half is devoted to the hands-on practice of copyediting. In this module’s initial week, students learn what copyeditors do, the levels and types of copyediting, and the cardinal

copyediting rule to “do no harm” to the document. For the remaining weeks, students complete numerous weekly exercises in which they perform light, medium, or heavy copyediting on an array of documents; the exercises correspond to the assigned chapters for the given week. Interspersed with the copyediting activities are an occasional proofreading assignment and four or five short grammar assessments focused on issues such as dangling participles, use of colon and semicolon, antecedent-referent, and the like. Given Melonçon’s concern about the pedagogical effectiveness of such quizzes (2019, p. 182), we note that these exercises take 10 minutes to complete and are selected based on the issues that emerge as students identify and correct grammatical and mechanical errors in the documents they copyedit.

Each module has its own required text. Angus Phillips and Giles Clark’s bestselling *Inside Book Publishing* (2025) anchors the initial module. This regularly updated work has become the textbook of choice for many publishing studies courses around the world. Although Phillips and Clark draw many of their examples from British publishing, their discussions are nonetheless relevant for both students and publishing professionals in the US (and most countries) due to the global nature of today’s publishing world. That the authors have crafted a text that functions simultaneously as an academically informed work, industry reference manual, and early-career guide helps explain why it is so frequently adopted and read by those in the industry, too. So, too, does its keen understanding of both the ways our digital culture has transformed and, at times, upended the industry and the global nature and accompanying cultural specificity that characterize publishing today. The second module uses Amy Einsohn and Marilyn Schwartz’s *The Copyeditor’s Handbook* (2019), now in its fourth edition, an equally revered, essential choice for copyediting courses and professional editors. During some offerings, depending on participant interest, one week exposes students to the process of editing fiction using two pieces from a beta version of Bryan Furuness and Sarah Layden’s *The Invisible Art of Literary Editing* (2023). Both modules incorporate supplementary articles, videos, podcasts, and websites. While this material is recommended, a few chapters from Peter Ginna’s edited collection *What Editors Do* (2017) and Carol Fisher Saller’s *The Subversive Copyeditor: Advice from Chicago* (2016) are required reading for the second module.

Delivered online asynchronously, Methods and Materials of Publishing’s design builds an active community among its students. For the publishing module, students each sign up to summarize a chapter from *Inside Book Publishing*, with the online discussions mirroring those of the foundational course. The instructor augments the information, offering correctives as needed. Each week, two to three assigned chapters are discussed. While

students must respond twice weekly, most contribute more frequently. Furthermore, participants often introduce supplementary material, some from their further research. Thus, the posts are not geared toward ensuring students have read the material, a concern that Melonçon has expressed about heavily weighted posts in editing courses (2019, p.182), but rather opportunities to engage with the material on a metacognitive level. This module closes with a midterm essay in which students choose two or three websites from a list of eight and produce an analysis based on those websites, read through the eyes of the publishing “insider” they have become. In the past, websites have included those of major publishers from various sectors (e.g., Taylor & Francis, Pearson, or Bloomsbury), literary agencies, small publishers operating independently such as Paul Dry Books, the Association of American Publishers, and *The Scholarly Kitchen: What’s Hot and Cooking in Scholarly Publishing*, among others.

*Methods and Materials of Publishing* is ideally taken early in the student’s academic career primarily because of the knowledge acquired about the industry. The insights they gain about contracts, rights (including digital, film, translation), marketing, innovations, design, and more often help them decide which of the MBA courses they wish to take. Moreover, this background equips them with a solid foundation to approach the MBA material and its relevancy to the publishing field. Similarly, *Inside Book Publishing’s* coverage of design, marketing, and production elucidates the art or design elective. However, if it is not possible to take the course early, the other English certificate courses also afford fine preparation for the non-English offerings.

The second module’s first week continues the collaborative discussions but now based on readings about what copyeditors do, with the instructor leading the exchange on the online forum. As part of the copyediting work, students pose author queries and construct an accompanying guide explaining their processes and rationale for their changes. These supplements ensure that students “think critically about the work and the knowledge production of editing” (Melonçon, 2019, p. 179). Students collaborate on one or two assignments. The documents to be copyedited include specialized pieces for business, higher education, advertising, sales, manuals, public health, general interest, and more. Because almost all certificate students also take Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing, there are fewer assignments dealing with this content. The instructor reviews each copyediting assignment, supplying individual comments, a master sheet with suggested copyedits and a video explaining the master answer key. The feedback process for the grammar exercises adopts the same approach. This module—and the course—concludes with a copyediting final exam.

Both modules represent the kind of academic rigor and practical application of theory expected of graduate credit-bearing courses. More than vocational training, they ask students to think critically; undertake occasional research (whether exploring an aspect of the publishing industry or fact-checking as they copyedit); reflect deeply about language use, style, tone, and audience; consider context as well as content; and recognize the importance of interdisciplinarity and, by extension, the ways in which English studies (and the humanities overall) has decided relevance to many other disciplines and fields.

### ***Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing***

The second option for an English elective is *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing*. This course provides students an introduction to professional editing, as well as the roles of editors in a variety of professional organizations. Introducing the principles and practices of technical, scientific, and medical editing, it discusses diverse approaches for editing and providing actionable feedback on others' writing. This course is centered on editing texts through the lens of rhetorical studies, creating and analyzing texts with a particular emphasis on audience, purpose, and context. The primary textbook for this course, Carolyn Rude and Angela Eaton's *Technical Editing* (2019), emphasizes this rhetorical approach. Additional readings are drawn from industry publications, government sources, and academic research in professional writing and communication. Structurally, the course begins by overviewing the nature and scope of technical, scientific, and medical editing. Thereafter, it moves into discussions of key topics in the field of professional editing: copyediting, editing with clients, collaborating with clients and coworkers online, editing for style, editing as document design, information architecture, designing a style guide, and accessibility.

Because the course is offered fully asynchronously online, class discussion occurs exclusively through recorded lectures and weekly response posts. Students are responsible for two weekly responses to readings and lectures. In addition to online participation, the course features four major assignments. The first assignment, the copyediting exam, evaluates students' mastery of the principles and practices of professional copyediting. In the exam, students work through a series of practical copyediting problems like those they may encounter in the workplace. The second assignment, "Editing for a client," asks students to work with a client of their choosing on professional documents, such as a resume, cover letter, website, or personal statement. In addition to offering students additional experience with copyediting and revision, this assignment provides practical experience working with editing clients in a professional setting.

Once students have mastered the basics of copyediting and working with clients, the course moves into related areas of editing for design and accessibility. Students apply class readings and lectures on design editing in their third assignment, the “Style guide.” In this assignment, students craft a style guide for a business or organization of their choosing. To create this guide, students analyze rhetorical and contextual factors that shape organizational communication strategies in medical, scientific, or technology industries. The “Accessibility manifesto,” the final assignment of the course, tasks students with drafting a brief document that reflects on the core principles of accessibility, or a user’s ability to read and interact with a text, in the context of technical, scientific, and medical editing. Students create a well-researched, well-edited manifesto articulating these principles and their importance to the rhetorical work of technical editing.

### ***Special Topics***

The final option for an English elective is the English Department’s graduate-level *Special Topics* course. The *Special Topics* designation enables the program to develop and test a course before formalizing it through the university course approval process. *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing* first ran as a *Special Topics* course, for instance. This designation also is useful for addressing the interests of a particular cohort or individual student such as a course in children’s publishing or one in editing fiction.

### **Interdisciplinary Electives in Business and Art**

As we have emphasized, publishing is an interdisciplinary field, drawing on skills related to multiple domains of practice. To develop a well-rounded perspective on contemporary publishing and editing, students must understand the industry not only from an English disciplinary perspective, but also from perspectives of business, design, and production. Even if they later acquire positions not directly in business and art, students employed in publishing or editing will benefit from increased competence in those areas, whether it be working with a marketing department on how to shape a fiction book’s promotion to accurately reflect its content or with an art department on the most appropriate way to represent visual information in a science textbook. Therefore, our students take courses in business and art that build on the skills and theory they learned in their English graduate publishing courses.

The business requirement asks students to take one of four courses: *Components of Effective Leadership*; *Innovation and Marketing Strategy*; *Law and Ethics in the Business Environment*; or *Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation*. These courses are offered in cooperation with WCU’s highly-ranked online Master of Business Administration program,

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and each course provides certificate students an opportunity to sharpen their knowledge of many of the areas discussed in Introduction to *Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures* and the *Methods and Materials of Publishing* courses: leadership within publishing organizations; the dominance of management and administrative abilities in editorial work (including in entry level positions); the marketing of books, journals, and other published works; the intersections of the professions of publishing and editing with law and ethics; and entrepreneurial innovation in the fields of publishing and editing especially related to digital transformations.

This selection of MBA courses coincides with Baker et al.'s recommendations and those of others on ways to strengthen and balance publishing curricula. Although directed at editing courses she has reviewed, Melonçon observes that “noticeably absent from any of these [course] descriptions is a mention or emphasis on ethics in the practice of editing” (2019, p.184). While the seven-week copyediting portion of *Methods and Materials* adopts as its mantra what is often deemed the cardinal rule of copyeditors—do no harm—and integrates its importance throughout, the course’s earlier focus on all aspects of contemporary publishing also cultivates multiple discussions of ethics concerning everything from business and marketing practices to copyright, AI, hiring and more. The MBA’s *Law and Ethics* course, as its title connotes, delves more deeply into ethical actions and integrity. Similarly, Maxwell (2014) has observed that “in times of rapid change in industry structure and the professional world, a focus on entrepreneurship is a growing theme within publishing studies.” Both the MBA *Innovation and Marketing* course and its *Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation* course address this need to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset and think innovatively.

To provide students with insight into the production and design side of contemporary publishing, certificate students also take an art or design elective. As discussed above, this component is undergoing a transition. Additionally, although instruction in document design is incorporated into *Materials and Methods of Publishing* and *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing*, a stand-alone elective focusing on visual rhetoric (*Theory and Practice of Visual Rhetoric*) has recently been approved and will be offered for the first time in Spring 2026. As it surveys the field of visual rhetoric, the course will offer students hands-on experience with document design and its principles. The program director works closely with each student to ensure the art, design, and production options suit the student’s intended career plans.

## **Internships**

All certificate students must complete a three-credit internship. The internship ensures that students gain practical, real-world exposure to the field by affording them on-site, supervised experience in publishing or media. Designed as a culminating experience, the *Publishing and Media Internship* can be taken only at the end of a student's certificate career. It enables students to both apply their new knowledge and build a professional portfolio. Typically, the internship can occur entirely online; especially since COVID-19, more firms and organizations offer this option. As the course title suggests, students can intern with a media firm, but most opt for an internship with an explicit tie to the publishing industry. The program has established relationships with major publishing firms in the Philadelphia area such as Taylor & Francis and Wolters Kluwer as well as local magazines and several literary agencies. These opportunities afford various choices from production to editorial and marketing experiences. The literary agencies expose the intern to handling volumes of author queries; culling through these queries and assessing them as reject, possible, or pursue; performing some development editing, learning more about contracts, and networking with diverse publishers, some of which are major trade firms. Students are also free to seek other internship options—though the certificate director must approve the site before the student applies.

The internship process begins the semester before the student plans to graduate. The student meets with the certificate director to discuss options and interests and then decides where to apply. If it is an internship with a firm that has an ongoing relationship with the program, the student applies only to that one, and the director alerts the firm that the student will be applying. The student drafts a resume and cover letter for the director to review; they collaborate to fine-tune both. When the documents are finalized, the student is ready to apply.

Once accepted, the student notifies the director, and an internship agreement stipulating the weekly number of hours (typically ten), contact information for all signatories, the duties of the internship, and the responsibilities of all involved—the student, onsite supervisor, and the certificate director who serves as the faculty supervisor. The certificate director meets with the student at least three times during the internship: 1) about a week or so into the internship, 2) after the director's receipt of the onsite supervisor midterm evaluation, and 3) again at the end of the internship to review the onsite supervisor's final evaluation, to answer any questions about the portfolio, and to discuss plans for the four- to six-page essay analyzing the experience and how it has shaped the student's plans moving ahead. The portfolio and the essay are submitted during exam week. While the

three meetings are mandatory, the director will meet with the student more frequently if needed. The director also handles any queries or issues from the onsite supervisor. Finally, while the *Publishing and Media Internship* marks the official end of the certificate program, the certificate director and WCU's Twardowski Career Center will continue to work with the student on job placement. Our graduates have secured positions at Wiley, Taylor & Francis, Red Nucleus, Wolters Kluwer, Harmelin Media, and elsewhere.

## **Additional Opportunities**

In addition to coursework, the certificate program features paid editing opportunities. Born of a university entrepreneurial grant, WCU Word Works is now funded by our Office of Sponsored Research and is the prime ancillary editing opportunity. It provides faculty from across campus with free-of-charge copyediting and proofreading as well as other pre-publication services such as checking a document's adherence to citation and reference style guides, formatting, and indexing. Certificate students are vetted and once accepted, hired to perform these services at a competitive rate. Students receive additional training to undertake this work, and the Word Works administrator (formerly the certificate director) reviews their early work until they are deemed sufficiently proficient to work independently. Besides being compensated to practice and hone their editing skills, they gain a professional line-item for their resumes; moreover, seasoned Word Works students can and do undertake freelance copyediting at the going professional rate. Over the years, students have edited manuscripts for a wide range of disciplines, including criminal justice, business management, marketing, social work, nursing, public health, Spanish literature (written in English), psychology, education, and public administration. Journal articles are the most common submissions, but faculty also request services for book chapters and monographs as well as grant reports and a few proposals. Conceptually astute and highly skilled students are also trained to index books; the turnaround time is often short, but users have been overwhelmingly pleased with the results—the authors as well as presses. The overall feedback received from faculty authors praises Word Works services, noting higher acceptance rates for journal articles and far fewer needs for revisions. The high satisfaction rates have meant continued funding for the program and loyal faculty authors who seek this service before submitting any manuscript.

A successful Pennsylvania Department of Education (PA DOE-Adopt) grant application has offered certificate students another paid opportunity for the past four years. The grant's funding of both faculty authors from across disciplines to write digital textbooks and the support system to produce them has enabled certificate students to gain additional paid editing work. In this case, the faculty authors are not only from WCU but also from several

other Pennsylvania public universities such as Kutztown, Millersville, and Cheyney Universities. Through this PA DOE-Adopt program students have edited textbooks for professional writing, criminology, chemistry, first-year writing, biology, social work, journalism, women and gender studies, mathematics, technical writing, and computer science courses. These textbooks are written not just for courses taught at the faculty's home institutions but instead for distribution across the globe. Again, students are trained and their work reviewed. As with Word Works, they gain not only significant experience but also a paycheck and a line-item for their resume. While this grant ended during the summer of 2025, WCU's Office of Distance Education and its FHG Library are seeking future funding opportunities.

These extracurricular paid opportunities provide the workplace practice and experience performing in virtual environments that Melonçon has urged programs to seek and expand (2019, p.182). Considerably broadening and deepening the training our students receive in copyediting and related skills, these opportunities create the intensive focus on editing skills that Baker et al. recommend (2025, p. 67; 75–76). Moreover, that these editing tasks are not part of coursework means there is more space in the curriculum to address other topics; all the while, students receive more intensive and extensive training in editing.

## **Conclusion**

The WCU Publishing Certificate offers graduate-level students theoretical, historical, and practical interdisciplinary training so that they can move successfully into work in the publishing industry. Drawing on our university's resources, publishing networks, and emerging alumni pipeline, our program has successfully placed nearly all graduates in positions in professional publishing or related media positions. Thus, despite its youth, our program has already begun to yield the benefits that Thompson (2014) has attributed to publishing programs "such as networking, job opportunities, and a well-established alumni" ("The traditional benefits," para. 1). In addition to the certificate's success in placing students, the certificate program has also enhanced recruitment and retention for our Master of Arts in English. When discovering that we offer a publishing certificate and that two to three of the certificate courses can also fulfill the master's degree requirements, many prospective students see the option to add the certificate as a decided advantage and commit to our program. For MA students uncertain about career paths, the certificate affords them a professional direction that results in their staying in our MA program, completing their master's degree and the certificate. While not all our MA students who add the certificate also complete it, they nonetheless acquire marketable

skills and gain important training through the courses they do take, resulting in their finding employment readily in the media or publishing after graduation.

## **Future Plans**

As we grow, we will further diversify our program's offerings and student opportunities to ensure the program meets student needs and the evolving demands of the publishing industry. In the future, we plan to offer additional course options in technical and medical publishing, expanding our overall graduate offerings in professional and technical writing and communication. We would also like to deepen the connections between our program and on-campus resources, such as our library's Special Collections and our Career Center, by integrating them more fully into existing certificate courses and creating further extra- and co-curricular opportunities for our students.

Before COVID-19, we had discussed developing an advisory board that included industry specialists and professionals at area publishing firms. Our internship program's employer evaluations have provided some accountability regarding the program's effectiveness in training students for the industry. Still, an advisory board would further enhance accountability and further tighten the ties we have already established with area professionals (Lawrence et al. 2023, p. 42, 46–47). Finally, we will be seeking to have our certificate listed on the Association of American Publishers' webpage devoted to publishing programs.

## **Advice for Potential Developers of Publishing Programs**

Universities wishing to build a publishing certificate program at their own institutions should consider the following as they begin the development process. First, potential program directors should draw on existing or build new courses that provide students strong methodological and theoretical foundations in the publishing industry. For example, our foundation course (*Introduction to Manuscript, Print, and Digital Cultures*) provides students insight into the ways that the publishing industry—its actors, agents, and technologies—has evolved over time. With this knowledge, students can analyze current trends and look to the future of the industry. Further, the two methods courses (*Methods and Materials of Publishing* and *Technical, Scientific, and Medical Editing*) provide students with extensive theoretical and practical background, preparing them for work in the publishing industry. Student success relies on providing them a strong curricular foundation.

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Second, because publishing is an industry that draws on knowledge from multiple disciplines, elective courses should not be limited to one field. It has been key, for instance, for our program to cultivate ties with colleagues in relevant disciplines such as business and art. These colleagues have been essential in strengthening the interdisciplinary offerings in our program, and interdisciplinarity across related fields allows students to enter publishing with a more comprehensive understanding of the various opportunities available to them as new members of the industry.

Finally, universities wishing to build a successful program should integrate well-supported co-curricular opportunities. Our internship provides publishing certificate students with concrete experience and opportunities to network in the industry. Likewise, in addition to providing students paid experience that they can place on a resume, Word Works allows students to develop their editing skills under a mentorship model.

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