

Stages and Strategies for multiple author works

Some NACADA publications (e.g., the Academic Advising Approaches book) involve multiple authors. What are the various stages of such projects? What strategies should I employ to work successfully with other authors, project editors and / or publishers' representatives? (Please confer directly with Marsha to begin developing a response to this question.)

Introduction

Publications that involve multiple authors and editors are collaborative works. Although writing a chapter can be a solitary process, that chapter needs to be in harmony with the voice and scope of the larger work. Thus, participating in the creation of an entire edited work requires team work, attention to deadlines, and receptiveness to feedback. Edited books go through many stages and multiple drafts before publication.

Stages of a Multiple Author Project

From the time NACADA leaders (e.g. Publications Advisory Board, commission or interest group) identify the need for a new book or revision of existing work, it takes two to three years before that book is in the hands of readers. Most multiple-author works follow a timeline similar to this one:

1. Editors selected and begin to discuss content, audience, scope, chapters. Begin identifying possible authors. Editors write abstract and outline for every chapter that will be included in the book. These are sent to the publisher and must be approved by them before moving forward.
2. Search for and selection of possible chapter authors. Typically, editors put out a call to the members of the sponsoring group (e.g. Commission, Interest Group) and/or to authors who have published or presented on similar topics. When potential authors express interest, they receive a general topic/chapter outline of the book and are asked to submit the following for review:
 - two samples from their previous scholarly (or campus) writings,
 - a more detailed outline for the topic/chapter of their choice, and
 - a curriculum vita.

3. Editors read all submissions to determine which potential authors' experiences and vision match specific sections of the book. Editors contact potential authors to discuss possibilities. Final authors are selected after those conversations. At that time an updated book outline, chapter abstracts and outlines, timelines, and author guidelines are shared.
4. Authors submit suggested changes to chapter outline and abstract for editor approval. Begin writing first drafts.
5. First drafts due. Content Review Panel members read and submit comments to editors. Editors read all chapters.
6. Authors receive instructions and feedback from editors. Begin writing second drafts.
7. Second drafts due. Editors read and edit for content, with guidance from copy editor.
8. Edited second drafts returned to authors for final content review and revisions, then sent for copy editing. Third drafts written as needed.
9. Copyedited chapters returned to authors for approval and final adjustments. Chapters returned to copy editor for final clean up and proofreading.
10. Completed and assembled manuscript submitted to publisher for approval and production.
11. Book is published!

Strategies for a Multiple Author Project

Working successfully with authors, project editors, and/or publisher's representatives involves flexibility, imagination, tolerance for ambiguity, and a commitment to the collaborative process. Along those lines, a useful strategy is to develop a measure of detachment or professional distance from your drafts.

While editors create and share an outline of what they envision the book will contain, the book really begins to take shape after the first drafts are received and read. At this point, editors may notice words, phrases, or concepts that are being used differently by different authors. Gaps in content will be noticeable. There will be chapters with duplicate content. Some authors will have taken a different approach than expected.

The overall theme of the book comes more sharply into focus. To create a seamless experience for readers, gaps need to be filled, one (or more) authors needs to trim overlapping content, and the overall message honed across every chapter.

Thus, the suggestions for revisions that authors receive, especially on their first drafts, are often substantial. Terms and concepts need to be updated to reflect the editor's definitions. Additional research may need to be added, meaning another trip to the library and more reading. Chapters that don't quite seem to fit overall flow of the book may need to be completely re-written or may be re-purposed as case study pieces. In some cases, excellent work that just does not fit the scope of the book may be edited out of the current project and published in another venue such as the NACADA Clearinghouse. Authors may be asked to read each others' chapters to hone specific points and avoid duplication. Authors will get lots of feedback and suggestions. It's not that what was written wasn't good – maybe even very good. But it also needs to fit with the all the other chapters.

This is where understanding the collaborative nature of a multiple author project, and a bit of professional detachment, are useful strategies. It can be difficult, even for experienced authors, be asked for a long list of revisions for a piece of writing they thought was done. However, the experience of receiving extensive feed back, coupled with the process of writing multiple drafts, ultimately serves to make not only a better book, but also better writers. Be willing to explain yourself and/or your approach to the topic. Yet, work to imagine different perspectives, and be interested in stretching yourself. Ask questions. Be open-minded. Only from great efforts come great rewards.