



Publish Workshop

Interview with Lewis Jones 3 September 2018

Terry

In previous discussions you've spoken about Simeon's Write workshops. You mentioned that you've now taken a further step – an initiative called Publish. How did this develop?

Lewis

I suppose it was just like the rest of the series of verbs that we came up with. It sort of evolved as the next obvious thing to work on. The idea of Write was that people would write papers and try to find outlets for the papers. And initially we had a great dream of publishing those papers in existing academic journals, well, maybe probably more cross-disciplinary for the most part. For instance, something on development economics might be directed to a regular journal but for most people the addition of Christian reflections and ethical positions meant that the papers couldn't go into their regular disciplinary journals.

Terry

Was this part of a longer term vision?

Lewis

Yes. Our long term goal was that over the next 25 years we could introduce Christian reflections into a wider academic environment through publications.

Terry

So, how did the vision fit with reality?

Lewis

I don't know what I had been imagining! The fact is that several realities struck pretty hard.

The primary one is that people don't have time for things that don't advance their academic career. The academic environment is so oppressive, close and tight, that it requires all of your life just to get by and hold on to a job these days. No one would conceive of engaging in something that won't advance her or his career.

And so we realized that timewise people were not going to take the time to write up their articles to the level or the quality that would get into an academic journal. That would take a lot more effort than a Write conference level.

So we decided we'd set our sights too high. But we also realized that if we could provide a package whereby someone could take a discrete amount of time – not a nebulous open-ended period – but just a couple of days, with someone to guide them to get it out the door, then we might be able to persuade people to spend those extra couple of days.

We saw people were interested in the concept – they'd gone to the effort of preparing a paper for Write. They are keen, they want to make something but it seems impossible given the rest of their obligations.

So we thought if we offer a discrete package that gets the job done then we can translate that keenness into creating nice articles.

Terry

How did that come about?

Lewis

Like everything, being in the right place at the right time was key. We were sitting around thinking about a recent Write conference. We were discouraged about not getting things published.

However, in the room was Jenni Graig who had just done a PhD at Charles Sturt University. She said, "My thesis supervisor, Professor [Mark Morrison](#), runs journal-writing workshops. Let's ask him if he will run one for us."

Terry

Is he a Christian?

Lewis

Yes, remarkably, a keen evangelical Christian. She asked him. He said, "great idea!" He had run 20 of these things with another Christian colleague for the university to increase its research output. He had honed it down. He has a great presentation. Jenni had been to his workshops and said they were really worthwhile.

So we said, let's try one. We did one in 2016. We said Publish will follow on directly after the Write conference. Come for Write, and if something is close to being publishable, stay for Publish and help get it out the door. And that was the concept.

Terry

Were all the papers seeking some kind of engagement between faith and scholarship?

Lewis

Yes. At many levels. For example, it could be engaging theologically with fundamental principles of a discipline. Or it could be how my Christian faith drives me to these topics or this discipline and this is how I see it working out.

Terry

What did that first 2016 Publish look like?

Lewis

Five people signed up. I thought that was ok for a start. We realized it was quite a niche activity and maybe it was difficult for people to take the extra 3 days. These people had presented at Write, except for 1 person who'd recently written a Masters and wanted to get it published. In the end, 2 dropped out because they hadn't realized it was an all or nothing progression through the 3 days.

It isn't just a writing retreat where you sit in a corner and get together for meals. It is a linear facilitated workshop that takes you from beginning to end getting an article out by the end of the workshop. You cannot miss any of it. So, I insisted that people commit themselves for the entire time.

Terry

How did it work out?

Lewis

We thought it was brilliant. They all made great progress. Some might have been 95% on the way by the time they walked out the door. They had a journal selected. They had laid out their article by the standards of that journal and its editors' demands. They had introductions, main points, supporting evidence. They went on their way feeling really good. It was so encouraging.

And the facilitator, who usually runs these for 30 people at a time, he said, "this is a fantastic idea, are we going to do it again? Maybe it will catch on!"

Terry

Could you give us a few broad brushstrokes about the actual program during those three days?

Lewis

Sure. The idea is that you come with a few things in hand. You need to have your results or conclusions already in hand. People need to realize that. You need to understand what the contribution is that your results make to the field, to the literature. That nugget needs to be developed. You also need to have done a lit review relating to the topic. You must bring all those to the workshop. From there it is a process to bring it all together and to fruition.

Terry

TH: can you summarize the process broadly speaking?

Lewis

Well, we start with letters of invitation. Once people have been accepted they are sent a letter so they are well prepared

http://engage.universityresources.org/sites/default/files/practice_files/Preparation%20for%20PUBLISH%20Workshop%209_14_2018%20%282%29.pdf

Part of the workshop is close reviewing by a writing buddy – one of the other attendees reads your work in light of what Mark is encouraging – pairing off for 3 days. So you get to know them—and that is another benefit of the workshop.

On Day One, you start by making sure you really know what is your contribution. You must be able to articulate it. You need to make an outline of what really needs to be said to get your point across, i.e., the concept of the article.

Then Mark goes into targeting the journal – how do you do it? He talks about how to go online, to look for journals for the academic audience to target and how to select the journal. From there, how to review what the journal requires of an article so you can plan to set out your material in ways that particular journal expects you to do it.

On Day Two, there is more focus on writing. For instance, there is a discussion of graphics, charts, images, and how to use them in relation to the writing. People write an introduction and conclusion.

Terry

Are people writing on the spot, right there and then?

Lewis

Yes. You go off for 1 hour to write an introduction. Then you come back and swap papers with your buddy. Each person reads through the other person's introduction and appraises it by the criteria Mark has given. The buddy can provide feedback even if the person doesn't know anything about the field. The logic needs to be clear. Ditto for the conclusion.

Terry

And Day Three?

Lewis

Everyone does a lot more writing. You have to support the main points in your outline. Mark also goes through issues like authorship, acknowledgements, how to submit the article, how to format it.

Terry

What do people leave with?

Lewis

This is absolutely the value of the workshop itself. You've learned how to identify a journal. You know how to submit your article with maximum effect. You know what place figures have in an article. It is very down to earth.

Terry

So in a way this is not just about writing *this* article. It is about writing *any* article/

Lewis

That's right. They have learned how to write any journal article.

Terry

It seems, then, that the PUBLISH workshop is achieving two goals simultaneously. It pushes each person further along the path of integrating of faith and scholarship. More broadly, though, it teaches each person how to be a better scholar. Right?

Lewis

That's absolutely right. In our naïve world we dreamed this up as a Christian scholarship issue and as a way to remind people about other worldviews and how to relate to them intelligently.

But honestly by the end of the first day of the first Publish I had seen how masterfully Mark was guiding these people with fantastic ideas about writing. Oh my goodness, this is so much bigger than only increasing Christian scholarship, though that's obviously important.

This is about the bigger world, how scholars will have better careers, how their jobs are going to become easier because they have taken three days to learn to write an article.

Terry

I find this quite a remarkable ministry with potential for the whole university. I remember at the English-Portuguese African movement conference in Ghana a few years ago that a Christian university administrator from Kenya spoke. She said something that struck me forcibly. She said, students are always coming to my office asking me for resources for their student groups. She said, the first thing I ask them is – what is your group contributing to our university? How are you helping us meet our goals?

So isn't this is a way that Christian groups on a campus can reach into the very heart of the research enterprise in the university in a really constructive way?

Lewis

Yes, that's why I am so excited. And the concept has evolved. We realized just how good it is and how useful it is for the general life of the academic.

We realized that our people are struggling to get their regular articles out the door. Our networks tell us about colleagues being sacked because they are not publishing enough, or in the right journals. It's all about money being brought into the university. Tenure in Australia is a fading memory now.

If by 2050 we want Christians as academics in our universities we have to support them in their academic careers so they can hang in there.

Terry

What a terrific vision!

Lewis

Obviously, we cannot do everything. We can give spiritual encouragement. But we can go further. So we changed the criteria for admission. Previously we expected people had already contributed something to the Write workshop. Now we've decided, let's just forget about already haven't written something for Write. Anyone who wants to write a journal article can just come, and we'll give you the skills.

Terry

Is this what you did in 2017?

Lewis

No. 2017 bombed out. We ran into a scheduling conflict and cancelled it. But in 2018 we made two changes.

We spun Publish off as an entirely separate event for anyone.

We also decided to go local rather than national. So we said, why not try one in these in big cities like Melbourne and Sydney. Mark was willing to do both. In the end we had about 10 people in Melbourne and we have 10 registrations for Sydney. So we've quadrupled the numbers from the first time out.

Our feedback from Melbourne this year is amazing. Everyone thought, "Wow – where has this been all of my life?!"

Terry

Who is coming to Publish? Younger scholars? Doctoral students? Do any more established scholars attend?

Lewis

Actually, right across the board. Certainly doctoral students who have to publish several articles in lieu of a dissertation, which is an increasingly common practice in Australia. They have to get papers out the door. They see the benefit. Three days and they have a paper ready to go.

Also, unexpectedly, this has been helpful to people in theological education who want to be part of the academic world but they face multiple challenges. Their training doesn't help. They are not usually part of the university. And the theological colleges feel less academic because there is less research and more teaching. So theological academics cannot so easily take time to publish. A handful of people from theological colleges are coming so they can stay in the academic game.

We have had one associate professor who came. He publishes regularly but he sees the benefit of the idea of a 3 day investment. Instead of trying to work on an article over an extended period he decided just to jam it all into one dedicated 3 day slot.

Terry

Is he using it effectively as a kind of intensive discipline?

Lewis

Yes. He would probably get the article written anyway. But I think he will also learn some things. And the intensity focuses him.

Terry

That's fascinating about the theologians – an unexpected audience and need you are meeting.

Lewis

Yes. And there is also an annual conference on Women in Theological Education in Melbourne. Sandy has been going for a couple of years. She offered Publish to them. They thought this was great. They are not only in theological education but likely to be part-time, holding down a job, raising children, so Publish is very attractive. Half of the people in the recent Melbourne Publish workshop were from that group.

Terry

This sounds like another unexpected benefit. Publish brings together theologians with scholars from other disciplines and potentially creates networks that might help bridge the big divide that many of us feel between our scholarship and theologians.

I'm going to be speaking about this at the triennial conference in Panama of the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). I'm speaking on "Where are the Theologians?" I'll talk about Publish as one way we can find each other!

Lewis

Exactly.

Terry

Are there costs?

Lewis

For Publish you need a room – the same situation as the Write conference. If you live in town, it's just the registration fee.

Terry

Does Mark offer his consulting services for free?

Lewis

Yes. We pay for his travel and accommodation.

We charge \$A90 registration for the 3 days. The room cost is very low. In Melbourne we stayed in a theological college. In Sydney we stayed at Golden Grove and it was also very cheap. We cover the speakers' travel and accommodation – a few hundred dollars.

For out of town people they need to pay transport and accommodations. So that is one reason we wanted to try this in major cities. The Melbourne group was all from Melbourne. The Sydney group is about 50/50 Sydney and Brisbane.

Terry

What are challenges you still face?

Lewis

We are trying to get to more cities, to everyone's home town so they can sleep in their own bed at night and go home for dinner. They're not torn out of their local contexts. And it's also a lot cheaper.

But that raises the primary challenge – we need other facilitators, not just Mark. Initially we wondered who would turn up. Now we know they will. So we need a succession plan. We are talking to senior academics who have a great publication record, who know how to publish and get articles out the door. If they could be coached by Mark and his pedagogy, and adapt it to their style of pedagogy, that would be great.

Actually, running the event itself is easy. Mark just knows how to do it. It runs itself because he is so experienced.

Still, we need to get more people there. Marketing is a real challenge. It is not just a matter of emailing. The issue is selling to people, persuading them, that taking 3 days is so much more efficient than struggling over weeks and months to get something finished.

Terry

Do you have testimonials from attendees about how valuable it has been? For example, "three days that changed my academic life!"

Lewis

Yes. We're collecting these and they should help inspire others.

Terry

What guidance would you give a leader wanting to begin Publish in their contexts?

Lewis

We were in the right place at the right time. It was a moment of providence. A need was identified and God dropped a person into our lap can only be thankful.

I do think we now know what to do. Charles Sturt University was ahead of us. Mark's university had decided it needed to improve their standing and they found the right people to run the workshops. It is wonderful that two of them are Christians.

I'd suggest, to do this in your city, call around to find the unit at your university, or even another university, that already does this sort of thing. Send your people to get trained by them AND then learn also how to be facilitators. Send a couple of senior academics to get a feel for how this runs and the kinds of things that need to be covered as a way of training Christian academics. Then let them loose.

If your universities aren't doing this, and many of them won't be, push them to help their academics by bringing in others to run it for them. In this age of metrics, it can only help the university to publish more and higher quality publications. Of course, you can then piggy back on that, as well.

Terry

This has been inspiring all over again, Lewis. Very many thanks for taking the time to be so open about all your challenges and unexpected blessings.

If other academics or staff leaders would like to chat with you, are you open to that? How can they best reach you?

Lewis

I would love to hear from anyone out there in the IFES world. If we can be of service or encouragement in any way, please get in touch. Also, if you've read this and have had some ideas about things we might try or ways we could improve, we want your ideas! We are not proud! My email address is lewis.jones@simeonnetwork.org. I'm on Facebook, as well, but I tend to get quite a few spam friend requests, so friend me, but also send a message to say you're with IFES.

Author: Lewis Jones

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