



GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing Launches
Interview with John Warren

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KENNEALLY: Fraud, plagiarism, misinformation, and misdirection – they are all toxins polluting scholarly publishing like chemicals tainting a water supply. A new journal from faculty and students at George Washington University hopes to provide counteracting doses of probing research and thoughtful analysis.

Welcome to Velocity of Content. I'm Christopher Kenneally for CCC.

Fresh air and sunlight are said to be the best disinfectants. The recently launched *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing* offers plenty of both. Its ambitious goal is to be a platform for unvarnished discussion of the realities of publishing, including diversity and inclusion, accessibility, sustainability, and equity.

The journal's originator is John Warren, George Washington University associate professor and director of GW's Master of Professional Studies in publishing program. Welcome to the podcast, John.

WARREN: Thank you, Chris. Thanks for having me on.

KENNEALLY: Well, congratulations, John, on the arrival of the first issue of the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*. Ethics in Publishing has been what you call a "capstone course" in the publishing program for many years. How did you decide the subject also deserved its own scholarly journal?

WARREN: Well, that's a great question. So there's a couple of reasons. First of all, we're really into niches here in the publishing program. We talk a lot about niches and micro-niches. So one thing I saw was that there's quite a few journals of publishing, some really good ones. I'm on the board of a few. And there's also some great journals on ethics. But there wasn't really a journal specializing on ethics in publishing. As you said, it's always been a pretty important part of our program at GW.

And I think the two main impetuses was besides the niche itself, wanting to provide a platform for students to publish their work. They could, of course, submit articles in other journals, but I wanted to give them a platform that they could publish their own articles



and that we could accept articles from publishing professionals like yourself and scholars of library science and scholarly communication.

The other major impetus was to have a place where students could actually get some experience working on a journal. So it's the hands-on, practical experience that I thought would be good for them for job applications and furthering their experience.

KENNEALLY: And in the first issue, Peter Berkery and Annette Windhorn contributed an article, "The Ethical Imperative of the University Press." It was based on a presentation in the Conference on Ethics in Publishing in fall 2020 that you organized. The authors, Berkery and Windhorn, recount a strategic planning process that led the leadership of the Association of University Presses to identify core values for that organization. Do you think those values should be a model for scholarly publishing?

WARREN: Yeah, I think those values themselves are great. I also think that the effort on defining your values is really important. So I think the values and the mission for any publishing organization, including organizations that provide services to publishers, like CCC, for example, should every now and then go through this exercise of reexamining your mission and your values and your priorities and making sure that they're still on track for the future and the growth of the organization and also the better good of publishing in general.

KENNEALLY: And the four values that they identified for AUP is intellectual freedom, integrity, stewardship, and diversity. They're all important, but intellectual freedom would seem to relate most to the concerns around ethics – integrity, too, I suppose. But there's a sense here that intellectual freedom is only acceptable if we sort of take for granted that things are true, that we can rely upon the information we're seeing in publishing. When it's unreliable, when it's misinformation, when it's fake news or fake science, all of that just falls apart.

WARREN: Yeah, I think you're right, but I think that all of those values apply to ethics in publishing. A few years ago, when I was on the board of the Library Publishing Coalition, I was also involved in their strategic planning process, and we went through the set of values similarly. I really would say any values that you decide on is an ethical choice.

Again, something we just went through in one of my classes – I'm teaching right now a new class called Publishing Entrepreneurship, and the first exercise of the course was to have students examine their personal values and do a strengths assessment and kind of reflect on those for themselves before trying to launch a publishing idea.



KENNEALLY: Do the students surprise you ever, John, with the values that they have? Are they the same values that we've seen in publishing for generations, for centuries? Or does the new generation have a different perspective?

WARREN: There's definitely some commonalities between them, but I think everyone is a little bit different – the mix. If you look at a set of value words – in fact, there was recently an article that the *New York Times* – I'm not sure if you saw it – a couple months ago that was like choose your value word of 2022. It had some suggestions and gave some resources, and one of the resources I used in the class was a list of like 50 value words. You could come up with more. So I think there's always – if each person chooses three, it's unlikely that they're going to be the same three, but you might have a repetitive word here and there.

But definitely, students of today I think are more aware of and interested in diversity and inclusion than, for example, when I was growing up. That wasn't a thing that people talked about as much. Definitely, the issue was there, but people didn't vocalize it as much.

KENNEALLY: So if you had to choose, John Warren, from that list of core principles, what are your top three?

WARREN: Well, for me, creativity is one of my values. Compassion and professionalism – those are three that I try to live by. I don't know. I think there's a lot of values that kind of help guide my life, I guess.

KENNEALLY: Well, it's a complex world we live in, of course, and publishing reflects that. In the first issue as well, there was an article from stakeholders in the Alfred P. Sloan-funded project, Reducing the Inadvertent Spread of Retracted Science. The authors examined the continued circulation of retracted research. According to the article, the problem of retraction and the continued citation of retracted materials is what's known as a 'wicked problem.' Wicked problems are seemingly intractable and indeterminate, because stakeholders can't even agree on the definition for a solution. So the problem becomes even worse sometimes when any attempt is made to solve it.

Tell us about the recommendations that these authors did make when it comes to trying to reduce the availability and the citation of retracted research. And do you think their approach is transferable to other wicked problems in publishing?

WARREN: Let me answer the second question first. I think that there's many wicked problems in publishing, and certainly retraction is one that affects scholarly publishing, but it affects all types of publishing. We see this in places like the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street*



Journal. If there's an article and then there's a correction, the correction tends to not get as much notice as the article. There's many examples that you could find of this in scholarly publishing as well, that the retraction just doesn't get as much notice as the original one.

I think another wicked problem that keeps coming up and I've done some work on – and many, many other people have – is the whole aspect of open publishing, open science, open access. It seems like a good idea to have research be open, but then it basically shifts the cost to authors. And it makes it easier, for example, for people in developing countries to read research that might be very expensive in subscription journals, but then it also makes it difficult for them to submit their research, because there's extraordinary fees involved. I think the wicked problem here is that people don't really realize the costs involved in publishing and that it is a process that takes a lot of care and expertise. Just saying research should be free is a simple answer but doesn't really solve the problem, I guess.

KENNEALLY: In the article, the recommendations the authors made around trying to solve the retraction problem specifically involved taking a cross-industry approach, trying to create categories that can be adopted by all stakeholders – in other words, some kind of agreement on principles – developing best practices, and educating stakeholders. That seems to me to be a good formula for attacking any problem in ethics when it comes to publishing. There has to be a cross-industry approach. People have to agree on definitions. They have to kind of see things from the same angle before we can really attack any problem.

WARREN: Right. Yeah, I think that's a good approach. And you're right. It's a good model. You might be familiar with – I just saw recently that NISO and another organization that escapes my mind had recently adopted the CRediT, which is a kind of standard for different contributor categories. You see examples of this throughout.

I remember – this is many years ago, but when online retail started to become more of a thing with the emergence of Amazon and also Borders, there was a major effort to standardize metadata which led to ONIX, which is now pretty widely adopted. I wouldn't say necessarily that's an ethical issue, but it involved a lot of different stakeholders in creating that.

Certainly for any issue, like you said with retractions, that kind of approach is beneficial. It's always good to get different players on the table. It's sometimes difficult to get people to agree. Again, open science, open publishing, is an example that I've been involved in many years, and you have people on different sides – researchers, librarians, publishers, funders. It's hard to get people to agree sometimes, but it's better to get everybody in the room talking to each other, for sure, and trying to develop new –



KENNEALLY: Yeah, absolutely, John. That would seem to be it. It'd have to be a big room, because there's a lot of different players. Talking about a big room, a group of people contributing to a single purpose, tell us about who serves on the editorial board at the *Journal of Ethics in Publishing*, and what contributing role will your students have? You mentioned that they will be working on the production side, and they'll be contributing as well. Is that right?

WARREN: Yes. Thanks for asking that. Right now, one of the first steps I did after deciding to launch the journal was to find an editor-in-chief, and Randy Townsend has been editor-in-chief now for about a year and a half, I guess. He formed an editorial board made up of Josephine Sciortino at Canadian Science Publishing, Lois Jones at the American Psychological Association, and Julie Vo at *JAMA Pediatrics*. Randy, Josephine, and Lois are all graduates of the GW program. That wasn't a requirement, but it's great that they do have that background with our program.

Let's see. We formed four student committees. There's an editorial committee, a strategy committee, a marketing committee, and an e-publishing committee. Each of those committees has a lead and about four or five students contributing to the committee on a voluntary basis. Then we had one student who joined the editorial board as a student representative. The first year, that was Gabrielle Bethancourt, who's now at Wiley. And I think that was one of the things that helped her get her job – not the only thing, but certainly helped. Now, the editorial board representative is Aimar Galarza. Then we also made a new role this year at the beginning of the year of managing editor, because we really needed somebody to just kind of oversee the whole management process. That's been Ashley Warren.

Yeah, so far, I think it's been – it's a lot of work for people, but the feedback I've gotten from people is that it's been helpful, again, for getting knowledge of how a journal works. Starting a new publication, starting a new initiative is something that you could apply to a lot of different jobs in publishing, whether you're on the editorial side or, again, services side or anything.

And I think that it also – for many of our students, they don't necessarily have a deep background in publishing. Some come into the program – they have five or even 20 years of experience. But others don't have professional experience. So something like this that they could put on their résumé, and even more importantly than putting on their résumé, they could really talk about it intelligently and give examples of what the challenges were and the results that they accomplished, I think is a real benefit for them.



KENNEALLY: Well, you were telling me before, John Warren, about the core values that your students identify when it comes to their expectations for publishing and how they want to act themselves in it. And I wonder – if a journal like this is a kind of challenge to business as usual, do the students also tell you that they’re frustrated? Publishing is notorious for moving slowly, for being resistant to change, and even being in some ways indifferent to ethical concerns. Is this new generation, these students you have in your program – are they going to change that?

WARREN: That’s a good question. I do think that they’re the future leaders of today and tomorrow. That’s for sure. And I think they will change publishing. I think you’re already seeing that. People, again, like Randy Townsend – he’s been very active throughout publishing, like the Council of Science Editors, other organizations. Another graduate of the program, Jasmine Wallace, she is one of the Scholarly Kitchen chefs and blogs on there. So I do think that there’s change.

Publishing is something that’s always changed. I have been in publishing myself for 30 years, I guess. When I came into publishing, the concept of metadata didn’t really exist. Now, it’s one of the driving forces. Again, as I mentioned, people didn’t really talk so much about diversity and inclusion, although the issue was certainly there. So I think publishing is changing. It’s always changing. You’re doing a podcast here. Many of our students are interested in podcasting. I think the ethical issues certainly are a big part of that.

KENNEALLY: All right. Well, John Warren with George Washington University and the *GW Journal of Ethics in Publishing*, thanks for joining me today.

WARREN: Thank you so much, Chris. It’s been a pleasure.

KENNEALLY: That’s all for now. Our producer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content from CCC.

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