



WALTER BLOCK ABOUT HIS STUDENT PUBLICATION PROGRAM

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Abstract

Over 150 of my undergraduate students' term papers have been published in law reviews or refereed scholarly journals in economics, politics, philosophy, and other such venues. This is the story of how this program started, and how it is implemented. Hopefully, this will encourage other instances of similar faculty-student cooperation.

Keywords: *Publications, undergraduate education, co-authorships, publishing.*

MY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT PUBLICATION PROGRAM

I have been teaching at the undergraduate level since the late 1960s, over 50 years ago. My typical practice has been to give the students a midterm, a final exam, maybe a few quizzes, and a term paper (due on the day of the final). For many years I would mark the term papers, and then forget all about them.

Then, in 1996, I got religion. I began to heavily edit these essays, add material to them, and get them published as co-authored articles. I would place them in wide circulation non-scholarly periodicals.

Let me now explain how I got "into" my present practice of getting my undergrad students' term papers published in refereed journals and law reviews.

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As you may know, when you send a paper for publication to a refereed journal in economics, philosophy, or political science (the fields with which I am most familiar), you are only supposed to send it to one editor at a time. However, law reviews work differently: you are allowed to make multiple submissions to them.

Well, one day, in 1999, I sent out not a student coauthored paper, but one of my own, to a bunch of law reviews. Journal A accepted it for publication. Two weeks later, journal B also wrote me an acceptance letter. I was about to send the latter journal a letter declining publication with them. However, I noticed a bunch of student term papers just sitting on my desk. The "lightbulb" went off on top of my head. I of course declined publishing that paper with journal B but wrote them to the effect that since they liked the paper of mine, they had accepted (which I could not publish with them since I had already accepted A's invitation), maybe they would be interested in publishing some of these term papers I was about to send to

my usual sources. I did just that. When law review B accepted one of these papers, I was amazed. And I was off to the races. I was astonished at this success and have continued this process ever since. There are now over 150 publications in refereed journals and law reviews that started out as term papers for my courses.

In my early days of term paperdom, if I could use that expression, I would have a two-step process. Right after the midterm exam, the student had to give me the title of a proposed term paper, and a 100-word description of it. Nowadays, I utilize a five-stage procedure. That is still step one. But at present, I am far fussier about what I want. Here is a letter I send to my students in this regard:

I have had a modicum of success in getting student term papers, of the sort you are about to write, published in refereed journals and law reviews. See attached. Doing so would be a feather in your caps, and mine too since I'll be editing and co-authoring them with you. (This is one of criteria used in academia to hire and promote professors; so, an undergraduate effort published in this venue is unusual). I have had over 150 successes so far, and see no reason why I, we, should not succeed this semester as well. I certainly can't promise this to all of you, but I'm confident that I will succeed in this regard with at least some of you.

Please send me the title of your prospective paper, and a 100-word description of what you intend to write about.

If you take a peek the authors in the attached, you'll note that I'm the co-author on all but a half dozen of them. Why? This is because a few of them are direct critiques of my publications, attacks on my views, as expressed in my books or articles. See attached on that too. That's acceptable. Your grade will not depend upon whether your paper agrees or disagrees with my viewpoint. But obviously, I can't co-author a paper that disagrees with my perspective, unless I'm convinced by you to change my mind. You'll have a better chance of getting published if you write something I can agree with, and I coauthor the paper with you. Why? This is because I've been

around the block (so to speak) a few times, and, hard as this may be to believe, there are some editors who actually like to publish what I write.

If I add to your paper and co-author, it with you, it has a far better chance of being published. But remember, I'm a free enterpriser, a libertarian.

So, if you want to boost your chances of publication, please choose a topic about which we both agree. On the other hand, if you want to stick to your perspective which disagrees with mine, that's entirely up to you. There will be no penalty for doing that. Indeed, I'll still help you get published, as I did for other student term papers with which I disagreed, see Sayers for example.

If you want to co-author your paper with me, and I agree to do so, I'll heavily edit it, and add material to it. But you must sign and send this letter to me:

(Date)

Dear Dr. Block:

I hereby give permission that you edit my term paper for the purpose of seeking publication for it in a magazine, or as an article in a refereed scholarly journal. I realize that, at your discretion, you may add/subtract material to it and co-author it with me, and/or may combine it with the term paper(s) of other students, into a multiple authored paper. I realize that the final editorial decisions will be yours.

Yours truly,

Your signature

(Print your name)

So much for step two.

What is step three? Instead of a due date for the term paper on the last day of class, or on the day of the final exam, I require a first draft at least a month before. Then, I divide the class into groups of two, and have them edit each other's papers. For example, student A edits student B's paper, and B edits A's paper. (If there are an odd number of pupils in my class, then X edits Y's paper, Y edits Z's paper, and Z edits X's paper). I send them my editing instructions, which include the statement: don't be "nice" to the paper you are

editing. Your job is to improve it. Constructive criticism is the order of the day. I'll give you a good mark as an editor if you are helpful to your author. On the other hand, if you get a perfect paper (ha, ha), leave it alone. I give the students a week to ten days to accomplish this task.

Step four is when I mark up the edited versions of the papers. Ostensibly, I am criticizing, only, the editors of each. But the authors see this as well, and, hopefully, improve their term papers, dues, as before, on the day of the final exam.

Step five is when I peddle these papers to refereed journals mostly in economics, but sometimes in philosophy or political science, and in law reviews.

I am intent on getting these papers published, no matter how many rejections I get. My motto for rejections is "Pearls before swine" and I keep going until I get a hit. Perseverance is my middle name, which I think accounts for a lot of success I've had with my student publication program.

Remember, these are undergraduate students, so success is a big feather in their caps.

Nowadays, there is a lot of emphasis of student teacher interaction on the part of administrators. I've garnered quite a bit of credit for this program of mine, since it is a very good way to interact with students: teaching them a bit of my craft in an unusual way.

Note

The complete list of published papers that resulted from students' seminar papers is displayed at the web address: <http://www.walterblock.com/published-students/>

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