

Should you be seeking a publisher for an academic monograph or a book of scholarly essays in any of the humanities disciplines, the first step in the process is writing and submitting a proposal. What is a book proposal? Why is it so important? What should it include and what exclude? How long should it be? What tone should it strike? When should you send it? What happens after you submit the proposal? How does one choose an appropriate press? This workshop will address these questions, among others.

### **What should a proposal include?**

Presses in the humanities will each have their preferences, but all proposals usually include three basic kinds of information:

1. A letter of inquiry
2. Brief project description
3. CV

These documents should be kept separate, but should form a single package.

### **What should a letter of inquiry include?**

We assume we know how to write a letter of inquiry, but many of the approximately 300 proposals received annually at the Bucknell Press fail to meet the following simple criteria:

1. Identify the author and her or his credentials
2. Describe the project: its title, nature, audience, and state of completion
3. Mention any special features: e.g., the need for many illustrations, tables, or musical examples
4. Mention whether the proposal is under consideration elsewhere
5. Express interest in publishing the work with the press addressed

This letter should be addressed to a particular editor by name; it should be written simply and directly, it should be clearly organized, and it should be 1 page in length, 2 at most. If you have a job, use your university's or company's letterhead.

### **What should a project description include?**

This is the most difficult part of the undertaking because the description needs to be accessible and interesting to (educated) non-specialists without over-simplifying the content. Most academics, however, have difficulty translating specialized, disciplinary-specific language, terms, and concepts.

Presses will expect different things from the description; for example, some will expect chapter summaries, some will not. Bucknell Press asks for the following: a few pages that address the substance and argument of the book, that places the study in the context of existing scholarship, and that includes a brief bibliography. We also invite authors to submit a sample chapter or introduction, and short chapter summaries when the project is a collection of essays by several hands.

The following are a few simple, important principles to observe:

1. Keep the project description clear and accessible
2. Avoid jargon or specialized language; if you absolutely need such language, explain its use briefly
3. Do not confuse an outline with a description, which is a critical, narrative account
4. Do not overstate your achievement – grandiose claims to originality or universal interest are usually met with skepticism, and usually backfire
5. Keep the document to “a few pages” (5 or so)

Neither the project description nor the letter should be argumentative, or prosecute the argument of the book by other means.

### **What should a CV include?**

Some cvs are very long and unnecessarily detailed for the purposes of approaching a press. The cv you send to a press should contain the following information, and not much more.

1. Your name, address and contact information
2. Current position
3. Employment history
4. Undergraduate and graduate degrees
5. Publication history, clearly sub divided and professionally organized. In particular, if you have had a book published, state place, publisher, and date clearly. Note if it has also been published in paper or electronic format. Note if it has been nominated for or won a prize. Note if it has been reviewed (giving venue, date, and pagination clearly)

Make sure your cv is up to date; date your cv.

### **How should the proposal be sent?**

Some presses still require paper submissions; you should check requirements by consulting the press’s web site or calling them. Many presses accept and many presses (as does Bucknell) prefer submissions sent electronically. Send such submissions in an easily accessible format.

### **Bibliography**

Germano, William. *Getting it Published: A Guide for Scholars and Anyone Else Serious about Serious Books*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

### **Websites**

Association of American University Presses. [aaupnet.org](http://aaupnet.org)

Bucknell University Press. [bucknell.edu/universitypress](http://bucknell.edu/universitypress)