

R154. Finding Your Home at a University Press

What Literary Authors Need to Know

ROOM 206B, HENRY B. GONZÁLEZ CONVENTION CENTER, MEETING ROOM LEVEL

THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2020

10:35–11:50 A.M.

Finding a publisher often seems like a daunting task. A university press may be the perfect fit. Many university presses publish and promote creative work—including novels, poetry, and memoir—that larger presses might pass on. Because of their size and focus, university presses can take more risks and give more attention to authors than larger houses can. This panel, featuring editors, marketers, and authors, will answer questions about publishing with a university press and what to expect when working with one.

TYPE OF EVENT: PUBLISHING, EDITING, AND TECHNOLOGY

Participants

- Moderator: Elise McHugh is an acquisitions editor at the University of New Mexico Press. Her acquisition subjects include poetry, fiction, and literary nonfiction. She also serves as the in-house editor for the River Teeth Literary Nonfiction Prize and the Mary Burritt Christiansen Poetry Series.
- Tiffany Midge is a citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux, a former humor columnist for *Indian Country Today*, and the author of the memoir *Bury My Heart at Chuck E. Cheese's*, published by the University of Nebraska Press. Midge won the Kenyon Review Earthworks Indigenous Poetry Prize for *The Woman Who Married a Bear: Poems*, published by the University of New Mexico Press.
- Adelia Humme is the publicist at the University of New Mexico Press, where she works with about twenty-five scholarly and trade titles per season. She holds an MA in publishing from Emerson College and a BA in English from Texas A&M University.
- Norma E. Cantú currently serves as the Murchison Professor of the Humanities at Trinity University. An award-winning novelist and poet, her work centers on the border and social-justice issues. She is a cofounder of CantoMundo and a member of the Macondo Writers Workshop. Her recent books include *Cabañuelas: A Novel*, published by the University of New Mexico Press.

- Anna Weir has worked as a publicist at the University of Nebraska Press since 2016. In addition to working with scholarly titles and a strange amount of baseball biographies, Anna connects writers of fiction and creative nonfiction to journalists, reviewers, and other media.

Planned Questions

Elise will open the discussion with a brief overview of the panel's purpose and an introduction of the panelists.

1. For Elise: How can a prospective author approach a university press to submit a manuscript, and what is the acquisitions process at a university press?

- You do not need an agent to approach university presses (although editors will work with agents too).
- You do not have to work for a university to be published by a university press.
- You should research potential publishers to make certain they are a good fit before you submit your work. Submit only what they ask for initially; most university presses will have some sort of "For Authors" page, including guidelines for submittal, on their websites.
- If an editor decides to consider your work further, they will ask for a sample of the manuscript or the full manuscript for in-house review.
- After an in-house review, the manuscript may be rejected, or it may be sent out for external review, the next step in the consideration process. While an external review can sound daunting, it's meant to provide an author and the press with as much feedback as possible to make the book as strong as it can be.
- For a university press, discovering a debut author, promoting a regional voice, and featuring work of high literary quality can be even more important than finding a "bestseller."
- University presses are here to publish authors, not just books! A press is interested in developing an ongoing, supportive relationship with its authors.
- Book production for university presses runs twelve to eighteen months in advance of publication date. When you're submitting a proposal in 2020, the press is actively producing books that will be released in 2021.

2. For Norma/Tiffany: How did you choose a university press as your publisher, and what has been your experience working with presses?

- Norma and Tiffany will respond with their experiences choosing and working with university presses.

3. For Adelia/Anna: What kind of marketing happens at a university press, and what is your timeline for promoting a book?

- University presses market books in the same way that many larger trade houses do, just on a smaller scale.
 - ARCs (Advance Reader Copies) of books may be sent to industry media such as *Publishers Weekly*, *NYTBR*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Library Journal*, etc.
 - Be aware that a press may not create ARCs for every book.
 - Review copies are sent to media outlets.
 - Social media and blog posts are created.
 - Books are exhibited at trade shows (like AWP!).
 - The press pursues email campaigns, issues press releases, and sets up interviews.
 - Marketing efforts are directed at libraries, booksellers, and professors.
 - Catalogs are sent to review outlets, booksellers, and sales reps.
 - Books are submitted for award consideration.
- If you have other ideas, talk with the publicist/marketing team to see how they are able to help and what would require the most time/resources from you.
 - Learn what the main focus and strengths of the marketing team are and how you can supplement them. For example, if the publicist primarily seeks print and radio coverage, you can pursue blogs and podcasts.
- Your publication date is not the start of your marketing campaign, but it gives us a place to start.
 - A lot happens behind the scenes before a book is published, but in marketing, a publication date gives us a firm date to discuss with media.
 - At UN Press, we begin discussing marketing ideas for a book once acquisitions presents it to the house (“launch”). In publicity particularly, the most hands-on work begins about six months before publication.

- ▶ The marketing process begins with launch at UNM Press too. We typically send final copies of books to the media a month before the publication date, but other marketing efforts—including ARCs, catalogs, email outreach, and event planning—can happen earlier.
- Most trade books have their best window for publicity and events in the first six to eight months after publication. Many media outlets and event venues will move on to newer books after that time.
- University presses follow the publication schedules of industry media.
 - ▶ Publicity calls—or in-person meetings in NY and DC—happen bi-yearly.

4. For Adelia/Anna: How can authors collaborate with the marketing team and best advocate for themselves?

- Ask questions early and often! We are excited about your book's publication and want to see it succeed too.
- Plan ahead and express your expectations and hopes for marketing as early as possible. Remember that promotional work for your book begins well before your publication date, so keep in close contact with the marketing team in the months leading up to publication.
- Keep us updated on vague plans (such as whether you'll be traveling, or whether you cannot travel) and what you are and aren't comfortable doing, like phone interviews or solo events.
- Start thinking as early as possible about what *you* can personally do to promote your book. Are you part of a writing community that might interview you for its newsletter? Does your college have a magazine that lists alumni publications? Do you know the editor of a literary journal? Reach out to these contacts several months before your publication date to see if they can feature your book in some way.
- You can support your book by writing and pitching op-eds and adapted excerpts, updating your author website, and distributing promotional materials like post-cards.

5. For Norma/Tiffany: What advice would you give to prospective authors who are considering university presses?

- Norma and Tiffany will offer advice for prospective authors.

6. For everyone: Why should an author consider working with a university press?

- Different presses can offer different benefits. A university press can offer decent royalties and perhaps a modest advance, more marketing efforts and personal attention for your book, and a longer life for the book in print.
- You do not have to be from Nebraska, a professor at Nebraska, a professor at all, or writing about Nebraska to be published at Nebraska Press—likewise for other presses. Being local isn't a prerequisite (although it can be fun).
- If you *are* working with a university press in your local area (or in the area of your book's subject material), the marketing staff will have regional expertise and a strong network of media contacts in that area. University presses know their local media landscapes very well and will be familiar with opportunities for book promotion there.
- Having an established platform will help with sales, but if we become your platform, or the beginnings of it, that's okay too.
- We bring the same care, research, and attention to detail to creative works as we do to scholarly works. We care about what you're saying in your work and want to give you strong footing while saying it.