



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
The Graduate School

“Current Trends in Academic Publishing”

Publisher-in-Residence George F. Thompson

The Graduate School at the University of South Carolina brought George F. Thompson to campus November 13-16, 2012 to consult individually with graduate students and to give a public lecture entitled “Current Trends in Academic Publishing.”

In light of the growing emphasis on academic publishing and the push to share ideas through new technologies, how might emerging scholars get their work off of their hard drives and into the hands of the public?

Thompson, a former editor of John Hopkins University Press and current academic publisher, shared his insight:

1) Clarify Your Ideas

Technology, for all its virtues, has also led to sloppiness, says Thompson. “We tend to think more carefully when we have to white-out or re-write something. Although the technology is there [in the academic publishing industry], the process of revise, resubmit, and peer review still takes the same amount of time.”

As a litmus test, Thompson suggests looking at the title of your work. “If you cannot summarize your thesis in a succinct title, you probably don’t have a clear enough idea.”

To make the leap from an article to a book, Thompson suggests a similar process: “Vet your thesis through an article first. If your main idea withstands the scrutiny of a peer-reviewed article, then you can move to the book.”

2) **Avoid Revise & Resubmit**

A press spends about \$1,500 to peer-review a manuscript. To publish a book, the cost jumps to \$20,000-\$30,000. Tightening budget constraints across industries, including academic publishing, mean

- less opportunity for younger scholars to rely on the advanced book contracts

- longer lag times between submission and response for peer-reviewed articles

Despite these trends, the publishing demands for scholars remain stringent. This holds true for PhDs entering the job market, as well as faculty approaching tenure. Thus—for their *own* interests—emerging scholars and junior faculty stand to benefit from skipping the “revise and resubmit” process and instead aiming straight for an “accept with minor revisions.”

What does this look like? Expect to do more front-end work, Thompson advises. While still in graduate school scholars should get into the habit of relying on internal review. “PhDs should be thinking about networking now. Set up a circle of confidants who know your topic and can vet your material before it ever gets to the publisher.”

3) **Find a Home for Your Work**

Equally important, says Thompson, is to find a home for your work. “Never go to a conference and lay out research proposals on the table. It’s inconsiderate and unprofessional,” says Thompson. Instead, spend some time creating a context for your work. “Look at the books that influence you, the books you use in the classroom, and see where those are

published. Publishers invest in their writers and want a good fit. There is a reason it's called a publishing *house*."

4) Go Public

When consulting students and faculty, Thompson always challenges scholars to think beyond their immediate circle. "Don't just sit on your scholarship! And don't be afraid to go outside of academic publishing on occasion, if it gives you the opportunity to reach more people."

For Thompson, the charge for academics to offer their insights to the public is not just savvy career advice, but something of a civic duty. At least once a year, he says, "take the time and effort to speak to the public on topics in which you are working."