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The Laureate

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Under the Guise of Red Ink

The opportunity to work on the *The Laureate* and serve as the 2014 editor-in-chief has been an invaluable experience. I have learned about the editorial process and the difficulties that arise on both sides of publication. Most importantly, this experience has taught me how crucial teamwork and community are in the world of poetry, creative writing, and the publication process. I am proud to have had my part in the production of this year's collection, but I am humbled as well. I could not have fulfilled my role without the help of those around me.

Under the guidance of a mentor, an editorial board was established, including four others and myself. We set out immediately to call for submissions. As a new student, I wasn't familiar with campus. The other members of the editorial board helped me post flyers and navigate the best areas to access students. We set up social media sites, posted in local coffee shops, spread the word to our classmates and asked our instructors to help call for submissions as well. I had hoped to reach a variety of students and express the range of creative works we were looking for.

Immediately, the importance of teamwork was apparent. Reaching out to get submissions was the most important step toward putting the collection together. The use of networking skills and communication played a vital role in reaching the student body. Asking other organizations to spread the word as well

also proved a helpful technique. The submissions started to trickle in. At first I was worried, but as the deadline neared the trickle turned into a gush of last minute submissions.

The selection process may have gone more smoothly with a distribution of duties. Instead we tackled the pile as a group. Initially I sent only a few pieces to get feedback from the assistant editors. Once I felt we had a good idea of what we were looking for as a group, I sorted submissions and pulled those that did not fit our criteria. Having a large editorial board was nice, but it made communication difficult. We used messenger and email for almost everything. Because of the variety of schedules, it was also difficult to keep everyone on the same timeline.

I sorted the submissions by date. The use of the gmail account and electronic submission was especially helpful here. The team had agreed that pieces would need a majority vote to be included in the collection. Also, before sending out groups of submissions, the names of authors were hidden. This helped to keep the process fair and unbiased, especially as each member of the editorial board submitted their own work as well. This process worked well, and I was able to sort the pieces into submission groups, and then each submission group into selected and rejected categories.

Rejecting the pieces that were not selected proved to be the most difficult part of the process for me. I realized immediately that the writers deserved more than the generic, two-line apology letter that is typically sent out. But this was all that I had time to give them. A few of the pieces that I felt were strong but still didn't make the collection received additional feedback. At first, I thought this

might be a nice way to encourage students whose work was strong and needed a little revision. I've submitted before and been rejected, so I understand the first hand experience of getting that letter. What I didn't understand was the editorial side of things. Being so close to the heart of the collection was difficult as well. After attaching my name to those rejection letters, I went on to meet and workshop with some of the writer's whose work wasn't selected.

Not only did I not have the time to give these authors the in depth analysis of their work they desired, I didn't feel I had the authority. My attempts to be gracious turned into something more involved and personal than I had anticipated. And the special attention still did not result in the acceptance of their work, a fact at least one of them failed to realize. With the amount of time between submissions and finalizing the project there is not time for work shopping. The editing process itself proved to be another massive undertaking.

With pieces selected and rejection letters sent, I began arranging the collection. No theme had been assigned to this year's edition, but woven within the submissions I began to see imagery and themes repeat. Eventually the flow of the collection made sense. This part of the experience was done electronically and on my own. I think that more traditional techniques involving the spread out of papers and input from others would have made this process easier.

With the help of my mentor, I began making edits. The editing process may have gone more smoothly with more participation from the assistant editors. Going through the collection as a whole proved a bit exhausting. I wasn't confident in my abilities as an editor, and I didn't want to infringe on the authors'

work. My mentor's guidance and encouragement helped me to slowly become more confident with the choices I was making in regards to the collection. In addition, the time constraints, workload, and requests from contributors began to take its toll on me. I was trying to please everyone, and I was running out of patience.

Getting the first draft to the design center was a big step toward the completion of the collection and a weight off my shoulders. I had been concerned at first, not knowing what to expect or what my responsibilities would be with the design portion. Again, communication played a key role at this point. A few drafts went between the design center and myself before everything was ready for print. My mentor again helped oversee the edits and provided the expertise and fine-tuning needed to make the publication look professional. I was glad too for the efficiency and skill of the design members. Their keen eye provided stylistic imagery that fit well with the collection.

There were some hiccups with the printing process, but with the help of the Lee Honors College and all of those involved, we were able to finish the project and launch the first e-book version of the journal. I didn't know at first that this move to an electronic version would possibly save the publication from being cut the following year. I am thankful that it is able to continue as a place for undergraduate students to work and come together to build and share their creative endeavors. I know that as *The Laureate* continues to grow and change it will remain dear to everyone involved. I may be a bit old fashioned, but the experience of holding the finished collection, thumbing through the delicate

pages, and dwelling in the music of language is something that cannot be replicated in an electronic format. Being able to see the culmination of efforts in the finished project was the most rewarding aspect of this journey.

My experiences as editor-in-chief heeded something I never expected. I came into this project blind, and have learned as much about myself as I have the editing world. While I realize that our little project is just a slice of what the big scale publication and editorial boards go through, it has given me a deeper appreciation for those involved. It has also softened my outlook as a writer and submitter to other collections. Those with more experience will tell us to develop thicker skin. But I don't think that's the answer. I think the answer dwells in a softening of approaches. It comes from the understanding and appreciation of each other. There were times when I didn't want to read any more submissions. There were times when I wanted to walk away from the project out of frustration and fatigue. The reason I didn't was in part due to the continued support of my mentor, but also because of the writers who submit. This collection is more than a result of my learning experiences and hard work. It embodies the heart and passion of everyone whose words and minds and hands helped bring this publication together.