Co-Editor-in-Chief of the Laureate

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When I started attending Western Michigan University, I knew that I wanted to study English: Creative Writing. Creating and telling stories has always been a passion of mine and having the chance to work at my craft was an opportunity I could not resist. My overall goal in life was to be an author that could live off of her published books, but I also understand how hard of an industry the writing world is to break into. Due to this, I decided to start looking into the possibility of entering the editing and publishing fields after graduation.

I had heard about the Laureate my freshman year in Iliana Rocha’s class. She had the Editor-in-Chief at that time come and speak to us on submitting our work. Although my short story was not chosen for that issue, I still held great praises for the Laureate as a literary work. Last year, which was actually my second year at WMU, I applied to be the editor for the 13th edition of the Laureate. I understood why I was not accepted to the position because of being a junior, but I really wanted to try and gain the experience as an editor. So, this year I applied again for the position. I worried about the possibility of not getting the position. I found out that I would be graduating a year early and did not have my honors thesis planned out yet, so I hoped that the Laureate could help me gain experience and help my new situation of graduation looming closer than I had expected.

Excitement filled me when Becky Cooper contacted me for an interview! I cannot even begin to explain what it meant to me to hear her say that I had the position at the conclusion of our interview. The idea of being involved during the first year having co-editors working side by side on the Laureate left me intrigued. When I found out it was Samantha McVeigh, I could not have been more pleased. I had been in a fiction workshop with Samantha before and I admired
her ability to create and knew first hand her ability to edit and critique literary pieces to make them stronger. With her by my side, I knew that the 14th edition of the Laureate would turn into something incredible and would be an experience I would forever cherish.

Samantha and I had agreed that we should use the fact that the magazine was digital to our advantage and explore what we could do with the technology. We both loved the idea of including colored artwork in the magazine. We liked that we could now bring in more artists who specialize or may be more familiar with a different medium than just grayscale. We received some amazing pieces that I do not think we would have ever seen had it not been for the addition of color to the magazine.

My only negative reflection is the fact that we did not get as many artwork submissions as we had hoped. We did not receive any photography other than the photograph of the sculpture that is the last piece in the published magazine. We had a few photographers express interest and we gave them the specifications, but when it came to the deadline for submissions, we had not received any of their work. I hope this is an area that the Laureate can maybe promote more for the future editions.

Another benefit of the digital version allowed for us to give contributors a later submission deadline. I think this was both a good and bad decision on our part. It did allow students to submit pieces from final portfolios for creative writing class and it gave them time to work and do the rewrites that they wished. However, I think it may have been an issue because the deadline fell during winter break. I do not know if this was an issue for any of the possible authors, but I think that during break, the submission date gets lost. All of the students are relaxing and trying to get away from school and classes. I think that if the editor(s) are chosen early enough to have the deadline shortly after break starts, then that would be a better way to
handle it. It also gives the editor(s) more wiggle room regarding reading over submissions.

Reading through the submissions and making a decision was probably the most difficult part for me, by far. We received submissions from a large number of authors and almost every single one of them had multiple pieces for us to read through. I tried to read through them as blindly as possible. I would download the pieces and if they had a name on it, I would remove it. It was a way for me to keep the pieces I read that were written by people I knew on an equal level as those from strangers.

Numerous submissions had a dark tone to them and I could see that they were forming a theme. Many of the pieces addressed depressing subjects, but there was no way to deny the art and talent of the short story or poem. There were also some pieces that covered very controversial subjects that I thought were written well and had a really good story to tell. A few of those I had looked forward to working with and editing in hopes that the author would agree that the edits made the piece stronger.

My concern after reading through all of the submissions was agreeing on the pieces for the manuscript. I felt a little nervous that Samantha and I would disagree and have a hard time picking out the ones we wanted. I was pleasantly surprised that for a majority of the pieces, we both agreed. After we met by ourselves, we consulted our assistant editors, Adrianna, Emily, and Kimberly. We met with them and talked to them about the pieces that we selected and gave them a chance to voice their opinions on their favorites or on pieces on which they disagreed. Surprisingly, five people all agreed on a majority of the pieces and it made setting the manuscript up easier than I had expected.

Editing the pieces overall went well. There were a lot of little errors that we cleaned up. Larger parts that we had to change wording on became a slight issue. For the most part, the
authors understood what we were doing and the strength it brought to the piece. But we had a particular author who was really against a few of our edits. The piece was also one of the controversial pieces and it led us to contacting LBGT community at WMU to try to make sure we were being sensitive to both the author and the readers that may share these identities. There was a lot of back and forth between the author, the LBGT community, and us. In the end, we believe that we reached a good point for the story that satisfies the interest of all parties.

That same story had an ending that we were hoping to strengthen for the main character. However, the author felt differently about this edit. We acknowledged the author’s wishes and left it how it originally appeared. We received strong feedback that went against our edits in only that one area. It was interesting to learn about how to go about contacting authors and handling their resistance. It gave me a great opportunity to develop my skills in an area I was not familiar with before this magazine.

During the final edits and after meeting with the Design Team, we made the decision to explore the technology of the digital version again. This led us to pursuing the idea of recording audio and embedding it alongside of the literary piece. We were connected with the Western Sound Studios and worked very closely with Alexander Tobin on these recordings. Alex was eager to work with us and brought a whole new level of excitement to the project.

We were able to book a room in Dalton to do all of the recordings in one day. We contacted the authors and gave them the choice of reading their pieces for the online version. We had a great turnout for everything coming together at last minute. There were only a few authors that could not make it to the day of recordings. It was a long day, but it was well worth the time. Listening to the recordings made me see what a great idea this was! We were able to hear the
pieces the way the authors wanted them to be read. Listening to the inflections in the authors’ voices as they read added a whole new experience to the literary pieces.

Overwhelmed with excitement, I could not wait to see the final product of the *Laureate*. The online version allows us to show the amazing colored artwork that we chose and those pieces that have audio recordings have a link that leads it to a YouTube video. This video will play the audio and transitions between images that design the interior pages of the Laureate. It is amazing to see how much having technology can enhance the experience for a reader anywhere that they have Internet access. It opens up the audience from simply WMU and their families, to anyone that the link can reach on social media, through email, or found by a random search. The *Laureate* is also found on ScholarWorks and contains the audio there. ScholarWorks not only has the entire magazine available, it also has the pieces divided separately.

The launch party went very well. There were a few bumps while we were setting up regarding the slideshow. We did not have as many authors there as we would have liked. However, there were other events happening on the same day that we did not hear about until after we booked the room and time. Samantha and I made decisions on the fly throughout the public reading as we came across hiccups.

The *Laureate* was one of the best experiences of my life. I owe this experience to Iliana for introducing me to the *Laureate* my freshman year. I gained a lot of knowledge in a field I am interested in pursuing. I created connections with students and faculty that will last a lifetime, especially with Becky and Samantha. I hope to stay in touch with both of them as we continue into the next chapters of our lives. I hope that the new additions to the *Laureate* will be used next year and even expanded on. It was a great way to end my academic career at WMU. I cannot thank everyone involved on this magazine enough for giving me these amazing memories.