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Professor breaks ground with journal on sexual violence and exploitation

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Donna M. Hughes, Dr.



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By **Joseph Essig**

Staff News Reporter

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In December 2016, Professor of Gender and Women's Studies Donna M. Hughes published the inaugural issue of the journal *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* as editor-in-chief. Just a few months ago, in January, *Dignity* released its second issue.

Professor Hughes has been working on issues related to sexual violence and exploitation, such as human trafficking since the 1980s. She saw an opening in the field for a journal about the particular work that she has been doing for so long.

"There is no other scholarly journal that addresses sexual exploitation and violence and has an editorial position against forms of exploitation and violence," Hughes said.

When Hughes decided to start work on the new journal, she found significant support around the University community: from the Carothers Library, where she learned about the possibility of open-access publishing; from her colleagues in the international community who submitted initial work and from the URI Council for Research, where she obtained a grant for copyediting.

"I really appreciate and thank the people who submitted articles to the first issues," Hughes said. "All it really was, was a website, a call for papers, and my reputation that I would really do it and do a good job — it was amazing and I'm really thankful for the people who've been early submitters."

Hughes also sees the online publishing and open-access world as the keys to the work she is trying to do with *Dignity*. There are, of course, no printing costs. There is no need to process journal subscriptions because all the content is fully public, and Hughes takes no salary from any revenue. Hughes also explained the importance of the open-access model beyond her own project.

“There’s a whole open-access movement going on in academia, and what that means is that anyone, whether they’re a member of a university community or the general public can download the articles for free,” Hughes said. “With most other scholarly journals, you can only access them if you have a subscription or if you’re at a university that has a subscription, and they tend to be very costly. The whole idea of this movement for open access is that it allows anyone to access information.”

At the same time, she explained, leaving the journal open and non-profitable without submission fees allows professionals and service providers to contribute, who otherwise have no access being unaffiliated with large research institutions. This is critically important for what Hughes calls the “Frontline Reports” section of *Dignity*, where professionals can publish their work and experiences even if their articles aren’t necessarily scholarly or theoretical.

“What we’ve published in the frontline reports section has exceeded my expectations,” Hughes said. “We have people writing about things that nobody has done research on. The frontline reports section is putting new ideas and experiences, in a scholarly journal, and anyone who’s reading it can say ‘Wow, we need more research on that’ because we suddenly realize there’s whole topics that nobody’s done any research on. I have to say, that one section even after two issues has been more successful than my wildest dreams”

Hughes also takes a longer view of how *Dignity* fits into the larger movement of open-access publication and the future of scientific knowledge. She is aware of the risks that a journal takes when they move away from the most common for-profit models of funding. As she understands it, open-access is a way of keeping scientific knowledge open and free.

“I think that we’re right at the situation in this [open-access] movement where if we don’t get support from commercial publishers, because we’re

doing open-access and this is a non-profit journal, at some point I'm going to have to figure out how I am going to get the resources I need to do some of the minimal work I have to pay for," Hughes said.

Hughes remains cautiously optimistic about the future of the project she has undertaken, despite the challenges with funding and publishing. "We're going to continue to grow it, there's only two issues out, so we're just taking baby steps, but I want to make serious contributions to the development of scholarship and knowledge on sexual exploitation and human trafficking and slavery," Hughes said.