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A Writing Philosophy—Mark G. Plew

I think my writing philosophy has much to do with the importance that people around me placed upon it. In my case, I had the good fortune to study with and be around people for whom reporting and publishing were paramount—even more importantly believed as my mentor did that publishing on one’s work should be undertaken promptly. I was, I believe, fortunate to have been encouraged even as an undergraduate to write and to think about publishing. Having been encouraged to read exhaustively has helped improve my writing many fold. Though we are professionally motivated to publish for a number of reasons, not the least of which is promotion and tenure, I have found that consistent writing has made me a better thinker. I have seen writing as an important part of my professional and personal development and something that I have always thought should always be contributing. For that reason, I have very rarely undertaken projects that I didn't think would lead to better or more complete understandings of a problem. For that reason, I have rarely presented papers that I did not intend to see through to publication.

There are today a number of issues relating to anthropological publishing that pertain to individuals but also journals. As a state journal editor, I have seen a marked reduction in the number of submissions over the past decade. Although we might attribute this in part to more grey literature reporting or an increasing
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number of publishing outlets, there are notably fewer contributions from graduate students and academic faculty, and even fewer from those working in cultural resource management. Although there are notable exceptions, there are too few within the community who publish—something problematic given the quantities of data generated by their efforts. I find that there is and has been a growing sense of this not being a requirement of their professional lives; academics probably deserve some responsibility for this. To ensure that regional anthropologists continue to publish requires those of us in academic positions to encourage our students to begin thinking about publishing early in their careers. This may require us to invest more time in helping students conduct research projects that lead not to posters and conference presentations alone, but to publications. My personal experience is that those who get an early start don’t fear the review process that drives many from submitting their work. I also think that editors need to be more proactive in encouraging submissions—especially from cultural resource managers. Finally, I wonder if the trend toward multiple authored papers is not a factor in the reduction of submissions.

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