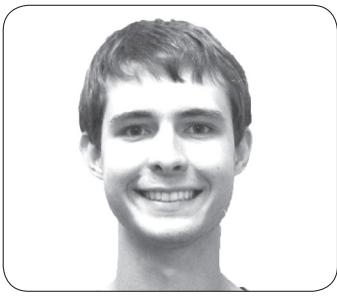


Don't feel pressured to publish



Conor Gearin

The pressure on university faculty members to publish papers to maintain their careers, popularly known as “publish or perish,” is an ongoing issue at U.S. universities, according to an April 2010 study in the journal PLOS ONE. The study concluded such pressures have led to increased bias in recent scientific papers. But does the problem go beyond faculty? Are college students seeking to enter the workforce or pursue graduate study faced with similar pressures to publish and present their work as many times as possible?

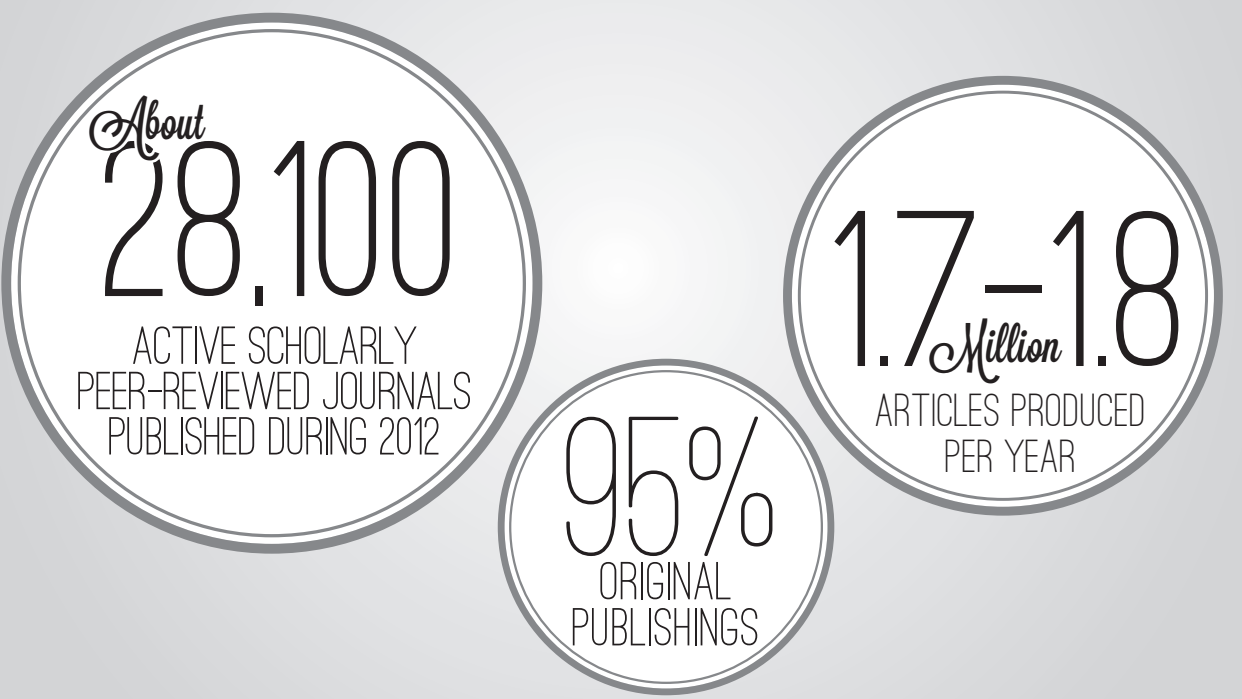
There are few national statistics about the number of undergraduates that manage to publish research or creative work. However, the number of undergraduate research journals has grown significantly during recent decades alongside a push to involve students in research experiences, according to the American Journal of Undergraduate Research.

The pressures on students mostly have to do with their major. For example, a chemistry student hoping to be a university researcher might have significant pressure to publish scholarly work. In contrast, for a business major seeking to enter the corporate world, future applications might depend more on having high-quality internship experiences or entrepreneurship than academic papers.

Even within a major, though, attitudes can vary greatly. Some biology students I know cram in as many research experiences and presentations as they can into their four years, while others just go with the flow, focusing on biology electives and non-major courses that interest them. Some English majors have had their written works published by literary journals, while others are content to focus on honing their craft at school without seeking a public venue for it.

I want to propose a middle path — without claiming that I have followed it perfectly. Rather

Researchers HAVE PLENTY OF PUBLISHING OPTIONS



Source: stm-assoc.org/2012_12_11_STM_Report_2012.pdf

than thinking only of adding to your portfolio, develop real curiosity about your field and publish work of which you truly are proud.

Biochemist Lisa Alleva praised the benefits of “slow science” in a 2006 letter to the journal Nature. She lamented her colleagues who “experiment themselves into oblivion” and advocated for working on research questions that might take many years to answer instead of smaller questions that will lead to a rapid series of publications.

However, Alleva is an experienced postdoctoral fellow, not an undergraduate, and she practiced “fast science” earlier during her career. During our four years at Truman State, we probably do not have time to attack the great unanswered problems of our fields just yet. A small research question might be big on learning for a student researcher, an ecology professor at the University of Maine pointed out to me this summer. Pitching in as part of a larger project can be a great introduction to science. Furthermore, encouraging students to hold themselves to the standards of a peer-reviewed journal and learn how to write at the level of practitioners in their field can benefit them by giving them the experience of working in a professional environment.

Yet during conversations about publishing, community-based outlets often are forgotten or seen as unimportant. I have written about local environmental and social themes for the Index, Truman Monitor and Windfall

because I know people at Truman might read them and might want to have a real conversation with me.

This community element is lacking in the dozens of national undergraduate journals. Unlike professional-grade journals, national undergraduate journals are not used to communicate significant work to colleagues and journalists. Such journals exist to prepare students for future communication rather than to encourage them to actually communicate with their current peers. I would rather have the real thing — writing for a responsive audience and getting into all the messy and enlightening experiences that entails — than sending my work to a distant publication read mainly by its own authors.

Former poet laureate Billy Collins claimed that people would be better served if less poetry was published. Readers get lost in “the haystack of poetry” looking for things really worth reading, he wrote. Idealistic as it might sound, I think researchers and writers should be audience-centric and not career-centric, seeking to publish when they think the work will be worthwhile to the people they serve. Even at the risk of less-impressive portfolios, I would rather foster the ability among students to connect with the needs of an audience than train them in fast-track publishing.

Conor Gearin is a senior biology and English major from St. Louis, Mo.

AROUND THE QUAD

Do you feel overwhelmed with obligations?

Yes. When you finish one homework assignment, you have twenty more.

Maddy Carney
Sophomore



Yeah. I feel like Truman ends up giving students too much homework.

Sam Rogers
Senior



A bit, with clubs or volunteering while trying to get assignments done.

Sabiya Azim
Freshman



It comes and goes. I'll have a lot of obligations some weeks, but then I can coast on others.

Lindell Sconce
Sophomore



Learn to manage your time in college



Elias Garcia

I've heard that college freshmen and seniors alike are slaves to two things — money and the concept known as “time management.”

Between classes, friends, life-critical activities and extracurricular activities, I'm often caught in a double bind. These moments of over-scheduling or forgetting an important assignment are the same, in that they're never expected and never pretty. The difference between success and failure with letter grades, running a successful school organization, keeping up with friends and maintaining your personal well-being are connected by a single factor — time management.

Learning how to manage time, along with death and taxes, is inevitable in life. Whether you are an overachiever or an underachiever does not make a difference — time management skills, or lack thereof, affects all of us. In my experience, there are three overarching themes to time management — the big picture

is more important than the now, less is not synonymous with worse and sunk costs don't mean a thing. Not only will you maximize your productivity by using these ideas when scheduling your life, but you'll get the most out of your college experience.

When planning out your week, month, semester or college career, you might be overwhelmed by what exactly to do. What homework do you finish first? What classes do you need to graduate? This never ending stream of questions can be problematic because it takes away precious time from actually solving the problems at hand.

To avoid being overwhelmed, attempt to focus on the big picture. The more clarity you have on what you want in the long haul, the easier it becomes to fill in the steps in-between. From these “big steps,” you can start making smaller ones. This focus on the big picture especially helps when you hit a crisis. Everyone experiences setbacks and if you don't mess up, someone else will do it and leave you to clean up the mess. The most important thing is how you deal with those setbacks. After falling behind, it's easy to fall into a panic. This is dangerous because it can lead to a huge slump, throwing everything into chaos. However, this can be prevented by focusing on the master plan. Remind yourself of the goals you have set. Focus. Everything else will fall into place.

Another classic problem some students have is the inability to say no. If you're like me, you are naturally inclined to want to do every sport, club, school and social activity. Not only do you want to have the college experience, but you don't want to miss a single thing. You want to have a stellar resume for potential jobs or even graduate school. But it's during this process of trying to achieve everything that you start to hurt yourself.

Not only does such a schedule risk your health and sanity, but Emily Wolper, a former Columbia University admissions officer, said in a Q&A for StudyPoint.com that it also doesn't help you look better on your application. Graduate schools prefer a student who is dedicated to a few organizations that really reflect them as an individual, rather than someone who shotguns as many groups as they can.

In other words, you should slow down and cut back. Enjoy yourself and the activities that are relevant to your interests. Less is not necessarily a bad thing. Not only does it make life easier, but it has the added benefit of looking better to those you're trying to impress.

A big time management skill students can gain is learning when to call it quits. It's really easy to fall into the mentality that if you've already invested a lot of time into an activity, you can't go back. The problem is that time invested means nothing if you hate what you're doing or if you

know what you're doing is going to fail. This wasted time, resources, and effort is called “sunk cost.” Sunk cost is value that no longer is retrievable in any way. Things like time or money invested should mean nothing when it comes to whether you want to continue or drop an activity you hate or no longer gain from.

Think of it in terms of a relationship. Who cares if you've spent the past six months with someone when you know you don't love them anymore? There's no reason to waste the rest of your life being with them. The same goes for classes and activities you either don't care for anymore or can't keep up with. Cutting your losses while you can will save you more time, effort and money than staying would have done. When you focus on what works for you, rather than what isn't working, you have more time and effort to invest into activities that will pay off later.

Never during my life before college was I ever given so many chances to take part in such a plethora of interesting activities. With a school like Truman State, the problem becomes choosing. With what I've learned so far, I only can recommend you think big, focus on what you love and cut back on what you don't need.

Elias Garcia is a sophomore economics and computer science major from Independence, Mo.