NewSouth Books Internship

NewSouth Books is a small independent publishing company in Montgomery, Alabama that focuses on publishing books about civil rights history, African American history, Native American history, the South, and books specific to Alabama. As an American Studies major and Women’s and Gender Studies minor, many of their books have a distinct social component, which is what drew me to intern for this company. NewSouth Books publishes everything from poetry to non-fiction, from children’s books to academic books, and the company also sells a similar variety of books in their bookstore that is also in the building.

I thoroughly enjoyed my ten week internship at NewSouth Books, and my two bosses, Suzanne LaRosa and Randall Williams, were instrumental in making my first internship experience both a positive and an educational one. I was given a variety of responsibilities in all aspects of the company from editorial to publicity. The major benefit of interning at a small company was that I was able to be involved in nearly every area of work of a publishing company. My main responsibilities were to edit and format manuscripts and correspond with authors, relaying to them any changes that can be made and keeping them updated on the progress of their book. I also had the responsibility of keeping our database updated with information on authors, libraries, and colleges, so that newly published books can be successful upon their release.

These general responsibilities included a variety of different tasks, each of which allowed me to develop many valuable skills. Within my editorial responsibilities, I was both a copy-editor, line-editor, and proof-reader. All of these roles would be separate jobs at a larger
publishing house, but NewSouth editorial staff combines these steps in their editing process, allowing me to experience three different roles in the publishing world. I developed stronger editing skills and attention to detail, and I saw my own growth throughout my ten weeks, as it began to take me less and less time to comb through each draft. I also saw myself grow in my comfort and ability to correspond with authors, giving them constructive points on aspects of a manuscript that were hard to follow or could be altered in some way. I was initially intimidated by the idea of criticizing someone’s book they had spent months or even years working on, but over the course of my internship, I became increasingly more confident in my ability to present my thoughts on a piece in a constructive way and to communicate with the author to make their books as good as possible.

I also worked on the production of books that were in the final stages of design, where I gained the invaluable skill of becoming proficient with InDesign, a software used in nearly all aspects of design for books, magazines, and newspapers. Through my work in the design and formatting of books, I learned about typography and style, so that a book’s layout both reflects its content and is intuitively setup for the reader. I learned to index, and I ultimately created the index for *Greetings from Alabama*, a book that I worked extensively on and that I was lucky enough to release for production at the end of my summer. For the project I enjoyed working on most, a poetry book *American Happiness* that I was also able to release for production, I edited, chose the font, and designed the title pages. I was involved in the editing and/or production of seven books total, each in different stages of their development.

Within my publicity responsibilities, I helped set up for book events, updated contacts, and created press releases. These tasks showed me the other side of publishing— the work to be
done after a book goes to print so that books can be successful. I made calls to various contacts, from museums to libraries, about books that would suit their interests. I worked to build our contact database by inputting colleges and universities with departments relating to NewSouth Books’s focus, and I received blurbs from different authors to create a press release of advance praise for books soon-to-be published. I also worked within the bookselling aspect of the company by making promotional pieces to encourage customers to pre-order books through NewSouth Books.

I learned even more than I expected to in my time at NewSouth Books, thanks in no small part to the time that Randall and Suzanne spent to answer any questions I had about specific tasks and the publishing world as a whole. I learned about nearly every aspect of publishing, I gained both editorial and publicity experience, and I also learned workflow management, as I was responsible for multiple projects all in different stages. My time interning at a publishing company showed me that I enjoyed the editorial side of the publishing world most, specifically the copyediting and the design stages. I am still unsure if publishing is the right career choice for me, but my internship gave me a starting place and valuable skills, and I am beyond grateful for my ten weeks.