

Blair Johnson '15  
NewSouth Books; Montgomery, AL  
August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014

As I've long been interested in a career in the publishing world, working as an intern for NewSouth Books, an independent publishing company in Montgomery, AL, was a valuable and exciting opportunity to learn about the field and gain experience. NewSouth Books has published a wide variety of titles including cookbooks, children's books, and fiction, but mainly specializes in historical, southern nonfiction works, many of which are concerned with civil rights. NewSouth publishes between 20-30 books per year.

I was given a number of different tasks during my two months at NewSouth of both editorial and publishing nature. The publishing tasks I was given were primarily finding and researching contact information of potential clients and to update NewSouth's contact database, FileMaker Pro. This included newspaper contacts, writers, agents, and other persons of interest for the promotion of the books *Voices Beyond Bondage*, *Time to Reap*, *Anchors of Faith*, and *Matzo Frogs*. One of my larger FileMakerPro tasks included adding the contact information of history and English professors at all colleges and universities in South Carolina. Other publishing tasks I was given included writing promotional e-mails, creating informational posters, and press releases. The book whose promotion I worked with the most closely was *Anchors of Faith*, a pictorial book of historical wooden churches in the Deep South. I contacted and sent informational e-mails/letters to all of the active churches featured in the book as well as local newspapers. I also wrote many blog posts over the summer that were posted on the company's website, usually covering mentions of NewSouth authors in the news. One blog post required me to watch and write on a PBS special on the

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Freedom Summer of 1964 in Mississippi as it related to many of the company's titles.

My editorial tasks involved reading and editing books. On my very first day at NewSouth books, I was given a task on InDesign helping to edit the format of a reprint of a Lewis Grizzard book so that it matched the original version. Being able to do editorial work like this right off the bat was very exciting. I continued work on the Lewis Grizzard book until the file was ready to be converted into an eBook. Another large editorial project I worked on was with the book *Tinsley Harrison, M. D.*, a biography on an Alabama physician (born in 1900) who founded and was a part of starting several university hospitals including Vanderbilt and Wake Forest. I worked alongside the editor-in-chief as we went through the chapters in the book to make secondary stage edits. What was particularly special was that some of my edits and suggestions were taken into account when Mr. Williams went about making the changes. I did not get through the entire book during my time there, however. Another editorial issue we took into account was whether to change addressing Tinsley Harrison from Tinsley to Harrison as the book moves into adult life, which I looked into by reading other biographies. Other InDesign work included placing photos and caption in multiple historical books. I also worked directly with the author of one of those historical books in editing the notes section. The task I enjoyed most was when each employee was assigned 1-2 books for an acquisitions meeting to present as either a rejection or potential acceptance for publishing. Getting to look at raw, brand new work was very exciting, especially because I was able to convince Mr. Williams and Ms. La Rosa into considering one of my books assigned for acceptance.

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I enjoyed my time at NewSouth Books immensely, not only for its ability to show me the ropes of the publishing world but because I felt that the work I was doing was making a difference in the overall workforce of the company. Although researching contact information and logging it into FileMaker Pro was not exactly exciting or fun work, the database itself is an extremely valuable part of the company and how it executes a lot of its marketing. Learning how to use FileMaker Pro not only taught me a technical skill, but gave me the knowledge of how and why to target different audiences for books and other products. As I was given sometimes multiple tasks per day by my 3 different bosses, I had to learn how to prioritize and juggle my work, a valuable skill that can apply to any sort of job or career. Learning basic office skills such as sending e-mails and answering/making phone calls was also useful, especially since I had previously been uncomfortable with making business phone calls. When I was working on the publicity for *Anchors of Faith*, I had to call every single active church in the book to verify their mailing address or e-mail address; although some of my first few calls were rather awkward, I quickly became more comfortable. Gaining new information and skills in InDesign from Mr. Williams (such as shortcuts when placing photos) was one of my most favorite skills acquired as I enjoy working with the program and it's also a program that's important to many different career fields. What was most valuable of all, however, was the effort that Mr. Williams and Ms. La Rosa put into making sure I knew what I was doing, understand how it affected the company, and made sure I was never bored. I do not believe all participants in any given internship get the same, special experience I did.

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Overall, I gained a great deal of knowledge and skills that I know will carry with me into whatever career I choose. Although publishing is still a career I am considering, I realize now that it is a much more difficult profession to be in than it used to be due to Amazon and the influx of paperless eBooks, which changes how books are sold and marketed. I've also realized that working in publishing is very limited in location as the big companies are located in New York and Boston, whereas small, independent houses like NewSouth vary from region to region. Now, in addition to publishing, I am looking into other related careers like advertising, commercial publishing (magazines), or any other field that involves editing.