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Authors
Stuit, Martha
Dobson, Roxanne

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Publishing Tips Season 3, Episode 2: From thesis to special issue with Roxanne Dobson

Martha: This is season three of the UCSC Publishing Tips podcast. I am your host, Martha Stuit, she/her pronouns, the scholarly communication librarian here at the University of California, Santa Cruz. This third season is a little different from the previous two seasons. Instead of answering common questions about publishing from graduate students and candidates, this season offers interviews of graduate students and postdocs themselves, including master's students and PhD students or candidates and postdoctoral researchers, and we talk about their publishing experiences.

These interviews were conducted in the spring of 2026. The aim is to share stories so that graduate authors may learn about publishing from each other. These interviews span eight departments at UCSC, so there is a range of disciplines included. Keep in mind that even if an author interview is not about your area of study, there is still something to learn about the publishing process and the effort and feelings that go along with it from these peer stories.

The interview in this episode is with Roxanne Dobson, pronouns they/them, a PhD student in the anthropology department at UCSC. Topics that we cover range from how long it takes to get published to publishing in a special issue and publishing content from a thesis or dissertation. We also talk about learning about the publishing process as one goes.

Roxanne: My name is Roxanne Dobson. I'm a fourth-year PhD student in the anthropology department, and my research is currently focused on Black farming and gardening, specifically in the New York Hudson Valley region. And I'm interested in, uh, farming and gardening as, like, a liberatory praxis. So how does that engender community and healing and, like, what that looks like on the ground, but also, like, the spiritual dimensions of it, so specifically the reclamation of Afro-diasporic religious practices.

Martha: How did you decide to go into this area of study?

Roxanne: That's a good question. So when I started the PhD program, um, my research was originally focused on what I ended up writing the article about, which was, um, Jamaican women teaching English in Japan. And so I was interested in, like, gendered political economy.

I was interested in sort of like these global flows of, uh, women's labor, specifically Black women's labor, and my master's project had been on that, so I had planned to continue that in the PhD program. But then when I got here, I kinda, like, found my interest lagging and, like, I had wanted to pursue something else.

And so around that time, um, my interest started veering into Afro-diasporic traditions, um, and also sort of, like, the rise of people, like, returning or, like, moving to more rural places in, like, the aftermath of COVID. So I kinda, like, was interested in, um, Black farms that would help people reconnect with nature.

And then, uh, once I started reading the literature, then it was very interesting to see that, um, that was something that had been going on, like, for a while, but also the context of Black farmers in the U.S. suffering racism at the hands of, like, governmental agencies like the USDA. So that influenced my interest in that as a topic.

Yeah.

Martha: So you mentioned an article, so let's talk a bit about your publishing experience. What tales from your publishing journey would you like to share with us?

Roxanne: I mentioned it taking pretty long. Um, I think that's probably the, the main thing, but also I think a part of it is that it, it feels so mysterious.

There's no manual on how to get an article published. The conventions seem to change depending on the, um, discipline that you're in. So in anthropology, and I assume with other social sciences, it's more, um, common to, like, publish something on your own or maybe, like, with one other person versus, like, articles in the natural sciences that are multiple person authored.

So I think in that sense, it feels like it would be a bit easier to get published if you already were working with someone that had experience in the field and had experience with being published and, like, you were working with them, and then you could also be published on, you know, whatever research that they were publishing on.

In Anthropology, maybe in all publishing fields, there doesn't seem to be any sort of, like, publishing archive of, like, oh, here's all of the journals publishing at the moment, and, like, here's the focus of these journals. The way it seemed to me was that you would have to find a journal based on what your publishing interest was or your research interest was, and then either sort of, like, cold email them, like, papers, or, um, I had a professor who would encourage us to write, um, book reviews, uh, to bulk up our publication list.

And so honestly, if my advisor hadn't sent me the publishing call for, um, that specific issue, I don't know if I would have been able to publish something. I mean, I probably eventually would have gotten around to, like, looking for something that would fit my work. I think I'd been, like, trying to publish for a while.

Like, I wasn't really even sure how it would work. I had sent, like, an article to my, um, master's advisor, and I kind of, like, was asking him for feedback and if he thought there were any journals that it would be good to publish in, um, because I just had no idea. I had no idea, like, how one would publish an article.

Yeah.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Roxanne: So, but you, you asked about my experience, so I guess that was to say getting into even publishing an article is so, there is no, like, manual. So then, I mean, finally there was a call for papers that matched my research, um, and I submitted it. I don't remember how long it took to hear from them, but I do remember after the article being accepted, uh, until publication, it was about two and a half years.

Martha: So you were already looking to publish during, during your master's?

Roxanne: I hadn't planned on doing a master's. I had wanted to go straight into a PhD. Um, and so after my first round of PhD applications, I hadn't gotten into any PhD programs, but I got into a master's program, um, and decided to pursue the offer.

Um, so the whole time my intention was to continue in academia, um, and to reapply to PhD programs. Um, and yeah, I guess even then, I mean, I knew that that was something that I would have to pay attention to in terms of, ah, having a career in academia. Like-

Martha: Right.

Roxanne: Yeah.

Martha: So you knew you were interested in research, and you knew the-

Roxanne: Yeah

Martha: that publishing was important.

Roxanne: Yeah, exactly.

Martha: Mm-hmm. And the call for papers that your advisor sent you was for a special issue, yes?

Roxanne: Yes. Um, so it's for the Journal of...

Martha: I think I've got it pulled up here, if that's okay. Um-

Roxanne: That would be helpful, yeah.

Martha: Anthropology of Work Review?

Roxanne: Yes. There we go. Anthropology of Work Review, and the special issue was on gig economies. So, ah, what kinda like the, I guess, social systems around, um, gig labor, so specifically people who aren't, like, salaried, um, employees, um, that experience a level of precarity in their labor just because, you know, like, they're not... Like, their contracts aren't sort of long-term, and so they might change from month to month, or it might be, like, a yearly basis.

Martha: That sounds like a really interesting special issue. So you started to talk about submitting and it taking several years, so let's, let's talk about how that went, uh, when you submitted your article.

Roxanne: Uh, yeah. So I submitted in like November, December of 2023. Uh, so that would have been like during the beginning of my second year of the PhD program.

I think I heard from them in like spring of the following year, and it was like, "The article is accepted conditionally." Um, and so they'd give feedback and, um, uh, request, like, certain changes. I don't remember the exact timeline, but I do remember getting that feedback, uh, incorporating it, then resubmitting it, and then, like, not hearing from them for, like, months.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Roxanne: Um, and then at one point, I think they either, like, switched editors or, like, the, the journal itself was switching, um, publishers. I'm not exactly sure how that whole process worked. During that whole time, the article had been, like, accepted. Like, it was like, "Okay, like, this is, this is good." Like, "We're good now."

Um, and then maybe like a few weeks later, um, or like a few days later, I got a follow-up email that was like, "Oh, like, that was, like, an accidental acceptance, like, actually."

Martha: Oh, no.

Roxanne: Um, yeah. "We're, we're actually gonna need you to, like, do some more edits to this, this paper." And so then, then it was like, uh, "We'll, we'll follow up with more information."

So I was kind of like, I, I was confused. I was a little bit, like, perturbed.

Martha: Yes. So that, that would be a little bit disappointing-

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah

Martha: ... makes a lot of sense because you probably got excited about it getting accepted and then-

Roxanne: Yeah. Like, I totally thought this was something that was gonna get published, like, within the next year, and that was the impression that I had gotten from, um, the editors, the organizers of the edition.

Um, and then, then, then it was like, okay, like, actually, like, you're gonna need to do more work on this. And, like, I was like, "Oh, okay, fine." That was also happening at the same time that they were, um, switching publishers or, uh, some sort of, I guess, like, internal systematic change.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Roxanne: Uh, so then once that, that took kind of a few months to get sorted out.

So I had submitted it, got feedback, um, or I submitted it, my bad. After a few months, I finally got, like, feedback from two reviewers. Um, and then it was kinda like the usual, I didn't know this at the time, but apparently the, the, the standard academic convention is that, like, one of the reviewers is like, um, like super loves your work, and like, has like, really great feedback, and like, maybe like two or three critiques.

And then the other reviewer is like, "Actually, like, in paragraph four, subsection five, you said this thing, and you need to like follow up with these sources, and I don't think you include all, enough of these sources." And so it felt kinda unnecessary, um, especially considering the subject matter of the article.

So I ended up, like, doing my best incorporating, sent in feedback, and then I was at that point where it was like, um, okay, like, your article's fine. And then it was like, psych, actually, like, you need to do more work on this, and we're actually, like, undergoing some internal changes right now. So when that happened, it was kinda like I was on pause for a while, because then I had to, even though I had submitted, um, an edited article in response to the feedback from the two reviewers, basically I, I guess the, there were gonna be new reviewers, um, and so then they would have to give me feedback on, um, this new version of the article.

So-

Martha: Okay. So another round of peer review.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm. So then, um, that happened. Um, the reviewers were, I think, a little bit more lenient the second time around. Or perhaps not lenient. It was less focused on, like, here's all of these, like, theorists that you failed to engage with, and more, "Okay, like, I see how you're incorporating these theorists, and maybe just make, like, these, these minor changes, like how you're framing this particular thing or, um, you know, add a few sentences contextualizing this thing."

One of the things I ended up having to, um, include was, like, um, a paragraph, like, methodologically, um, sort of positioning myself within the study. Like, so as a researcher, like, how my social realities would have affected how I interacted with, uh, my interlocutors and how I analyzed the data. So I, you know, added some methodological stuff.

Um, and then after that round of edits, uh, it took a, a while, but then they were like, "Okay, this is good." Like, um, now it's kind of just like the, I guess, the busy work part of it, so accepting, like, terms and conditions, like ensuring that, like, the abstract was written properly. Um, that, that sort of started happening at the end of last year into this year, and then it was finally published, um, on the sixth of May.

Martha: Wow, that's a long process. How long did it take in total?

Roxanne: So from when I first submitted the piece, that would have been December 2023, and then it got published this year, so it's, like, two, two years and five months.

Martha: That's quite a while. Usually, special issues are faster, but it sounds like the journal had a lot going on.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah. And it was interesting because, um, like, my point of contact would consistently apologize for how long it was taking, but then also say, in his experience, like, this was fairly normal with journals. So I, I don't know. I mean, like it was like my first time having anything published. I think I was more just sort of like, uh, like experiencing it all, just kinda like letting it happen, especially since I think it was kinda like, well, there isn't really anything I can do to make this process go faster. So yeah, it was a lot of like submitting and like long stretches of waiting.

Martha: Mm-hmm. And the revisions, the, the time to do the revisions, time-consuming?

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah. And I think a part of it was also like I still had to keep my edits within the word count.

Um, and so I had already the, the, the version I had submitted was already basically at the word count. And so it was also a little bit difficult to incorporate the feedback because like one of the reviewers was kinda like asking me to add stuff. It was kinda like frustrating because like, didn't the reviewers realize that like I, you know, there was a, a word limit and I couldn't really like exceed that word limit?

Um, and so what I ended up doing was sort of, uh- curtailing some of the stuff I had. So like, um, kinda like squishing it down to more concise phrasing and then the inclusions that I had to make, I also had to make pretty concise. Um, and so then once I did that and then submitted that for another round of revisions, then after that it was kinda like, oh, like, um, double-checking grammar and phrasing and stuff.

Mm-hmm. But yeah.

Martha: The copyediting.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah. Actually, copyediting didn't really happen until this year.

Martha: That usually happens at a later stage or towards the end, a lot closer to publication. How did some of the post-acceptance tasks go, aside from copyediting, such as typesetting and signing your contract and choosing whether it would be open access?

Roxanne: There were some things that, um, I don't know, were kinda like exciting having to do for the first time. Like, I had to get, um, an ORC ID. That's your number for the rest of your publishing life, basically.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Roxanne: Um, and so, like, doing, you know, like, doing that stuff, um... I think I'd always known I wanted to do open access, um, uh, at that point in my academic career, and still know.

I'm, like, a big fan of making knowledge accessible. Um, and the, I guess, good thing about the, the journal, um, and that specific issue is that they already were kinda like... They were like, "Okay, like, this is open access." Um, I don't remember if there was, like, an option where I could have opted out of open access.

I think it was more of just like, uh, yeah, I'm not really sure, 'cause I already knew I wanted to do open access. I was kinda just like, "Okay." Um, and then they had to ask, um, the institutions that I did the research at if they would consent to footing the, the bill of making it open access. Because I did the research at the University of Chicago and then finished working on sort of like the analytic aspect of it while I was here at UCSC, um, I listed both institutions.

Um, and that part I'm not super sure about. I don't know if they, like, ask both institutions or just one institution. Um, but yeah, like a... And I, I know from speaking to one of the librarians here that, like, UCSC does have provisions to make publications open access, which is really cool.

Martha: Mm-hmm. Yes. Yeah, the agreements with particular publishers to fund the article processing charge or open access fees is really significant and helpful for authors, and there are a number of, uh, journals that have that kind of coverage.

Yeah. Um, that's great that you had a few options to support that. Had you already been familiar with open access?

Roxanne: Conceptually, like, yes. Uh, many of the academic pieces I've accessed over the years have been open access. Um, and so I think it was kinda like, not really a no-brainer, but like this is something I'd also want to, to participate in.

Like, I just don't see the point of having it behind a paywall.

Martha: Mm-hmm.

Roxanne: Yeah

Martha: More people can read it then.

Roxanne: Yeah, exactly.

Martha: Yeah. Excellent. How does this article now fit into your larger publishing strategy and goals in your program?

Roxanne: I don't know if I have much of a strategy. Um, at this point it's kinda just, like, a- in fact, since submitting to that journal, I don't think I've, like. I've come across very few journal proposals, by word of mouth.

And so I think once I'm ready to publish again, I'll probably have to go searching. Um, but I think that's also the other thing. Um, I don't know if I'm necessarily ready to publish again. Um, I do have other pieces that I think I would like to, like I would be interested in publishing. Um, but I'm also not really in a place where my, like, spare time is spent searching for new publishing opportunities.

Um, I think especially now that I'm working on my qualifying exams, um, and so I think that's kinda, like, that has been eating up a lot of my time. But I think if I were to come across a publishing call that aligned with some of my research interests or, like, articles I've already written, then I would be, I would be interested in submitting to those.

Um, so I, I have a feeling it's gonna be something that I will have to refine and figure out over the years. Um, but for right now, um, not actively looking to publish anything else. Um, I think probably I'm more interested in, like, visiting conferences, um, kinda like seeing what other people are working on and thinking about even before it ends up being published.

Martha: And it sounds like you've had a pretty significant shift in your research focus.

Roxanne: Yeah.

Martha: So that takes some time to gather new research, new data, new scholarship to form something that could be an article in that area.

Roxanne: Yeah. That's- that's true. It's something I don't really think about a lot, but, like, my most recent, um, research direction kind of evolved over the last two years, um, which is very different from my other project which I have been working on.

By the time I ended up publishing, like, I had had that for, like, four years. It might be a while before I'm ready to publish anything on this, this new topic.

Martha: So because you published after your master's program, I'm figuring this article wasn't part of your master's thesis?

Roxanne: So it was, it was actually my master's thesis-

Martha: Oh, okay

Roxanne: um, that I then pared down to fit the word requirement for, um, the, the publication call. That's also interesting because as a part of my program, the thesis was made open access, um, and I guess was published. Well, not technically published, just like was hosted in like this repository of master's theses in the program.

Um, so I did kind of like have to check the fine print to make sure that I could still publish this as a separate article, and it seemed like it was fine, especially since, um, having it open access as a part of like other thesis papers didn't disqualify it from being like formally published by a journal.

Martha: And a thesis is a pretty different product from an article.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah, I guess that would explain the paring down. Um, so I ended up cutting a lot of sort of like introductory material to the article, and I ended up focusing mostly on the ethnographic data and then the theoretical engagements in response to that data.

Martha: So going forward, since you're researching other topics now, this article won't be part of your future dissertation, correct?

Roxanne: No, yeah.

Martha: Or is that... Or I'm not sure if in anthropology dissertations are comprised of articles or if they're their own narrative.

Roxanne: Uh, so from my experience or I guess based on what I've been told and have heard in the discipline, um, anthropological dissertations are sort of like closer to books, like manuscript sizes.

Uh, and so a lot of people end up doing after they defend their dissertations and graduate, um, is like that manuscript becomes like their first book. Um, yeah, so it's not like, it's less a collection of articles and more sort of like this like coherent manuscript that is like supposed to eventually become like your first publication, like your first like book-level publication.

Yeah.

Martha: That's both exciting and-

Roxanne: Terrifying?

Martha: Yes.

Roxanne: Uh, yeah. Yeah. On one hand, it's kind of like, um- I- it's like, oh, I have a headstart because, like, in anthropology it's very normal, like it's- it's expected that you have, um, a book-level, like, manuscript or, like, that you- you have basically, like you have published a book.

Um, and so in that sense it's like it helps you get, like, at least half the way there. But on the other hand, it's like I can see how editing something of that magnitude would be daunting. But I haven't gotten there yet, so that's, that's a concern for future me.

Martha: Yes. And since you're coming up on qualifying exams, like, in the fall or something, or is that summer?

Uh,

Roxanne: probably this summer, yeah.

Martha: Uh, you have plenty of time ahead of you.

Roxanne: Yeah.

Martha: Well, Roxanne, congratulations on your new article.

Roxanne: Thank you!

Martha: It's really exciting, uh, that it's published now. And so I wanna ask you as we wrap up, uh, if there's anything else you'd like to share about publishing and/or any takeaways for new authors that you learned during this process?

Roxanne: I guess I would say that feeling like you don't know what you're doing is not your fault. Um, like, it seems to be obtuse on purpose. And to finally eventually publish something is gonna be a combination of just, like, knowing the right people, being in the right place at the right time, and probably, like, keeping your nose to the grindstone.

Martha: It's a lot of luck, and it's hard to plan for that.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah. Like, um, you know, on one hand, it's kinda like the, the idea of putting yourself in places where you, like, come across, like, frequent op- opportunities. But

at the same time, it's- it's also kinda difficult to know where, um, those opportunities will be.

And also, like, you just can't know, like, when things are gonna happen. So yeah, it's, it's definitely luck. Like, you- you can try to coordinate some of it.

Martha: Well, it sounds like you'll be doing that going forward with going to some conferences.

Roxanne: Yeah, yeah. Uh, planned happenstance, yeah.

Martha: Excellent. Well, it's been so nice to talk with you today, Roxanne.

Roxanne: You too.

Martha: Thanks for listening. This season of Publishing Tips was produced by Daniel Story and me, Martha Stuit, with additional editing support from Isaiah Brazel and Jennessy Barba. Daniel, Isaiah, and Jennessy are all part of the University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, and we thank them for their support of this podcast.

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Thank you!