

Millikin's Bronze Man Books takes publishing from the classroom to the business world

By VALERIE WELLS - H&R Staff Writer | Sunday, May 22, 2011

DECATUR - Most people who have visited Millikin University have noticed, and possibly spoken to, the man on the bench, intently reading a book. He won't answer you; he's a bronze sculpture. But he and his book inspired the name of Bronze Man Books, the publishing house of Millikin University. Begun five years ago, Bronze Man Books was originally formed as a way to teach students about the publishing business, said Randy Brooks, the English professor who teaches "The Art of Publishing." It has become much more.

The most recent book with the imprint is "Monsters Don't Read" by Heather Champion, a teacher at Argenta-Oreana School, illustrated by Chris Knudson. Both are Millikin alumni. Champion originally wrote the book as part of a class at Millikin.

Children's books are a tough sell, Brooks said, because the market is limited and a lot of people want to write them, but when a good one comes along, it can take off. "Since we started five years ago, we've worked on developing several different lines of book publications and also developing our strategy of teaching this as an entrepreneurial course for students interested in joining a publication company," Brooks said.

One of those lines is art books, usually published in conjunction with an art exhibition. The books include reproductions of the artist's work and biographical information, so the books become a keepsake and collector's item.

"We work with the artist or with the estate of the artist and with collectors and try to put together a wonderful collection of their work that represents them as well as a theoretical background of their place in the art world," Brooks said.

Another line is the chapbooks, small-run publications of poetry or literature, and sometimes put together by hand, even to stitching the pages together in group work sessions Brooks dubbed "sewfests." Each is unique in its design, with the idea of the design reflecting the content and the artist's vision.

Collaboration is the key, he said, with students and professors from several departments pitching in to help as needed. Another recent book is "Oops, Did I Say That?" which is a guide to what to say - and what not to say - to someone who is seriously ill, and written by a student who went through cancer treatments as a 14-year-old.

"She realized people had said awful things to her when she was at St. Jude Children's Hospital," Brooks said. "They think they're encouraging, but it was things that destroyed her."

One of those things is "You look good," when the patient knows she doesn't.

"I remember her saying she looked like a 14-year-old boy," said Aubrie Cox, senior editor. "She had no hair because of the chemotherapy." As publishers, the staff of Bronze Man worked with the student to include the alternative—things people should say to make the patient feel better. On facing pages are the wrong and the right thing to say.

Students in the class, which can be taken several times rather than just once, learn all aspects of publishing, from reading submitted manuscripts and choosing which to publish, to editing, designing and marketing the books.

Cox is a writer herself, and she said learning to look at manuscripts with an editor's eye as well as a writer's eye has been invaluable in improving her own writing skills.

Millikin is making more of its classes into real-world experiences, to better prepare students for careers. "Students are learning this as a business," Brooks said. vwells@herald-review.com | 421-7982



Bronze Man Books faculty adviser professor Randy Brooks and senior student editor Aubrie Cox discuss the successes that the Millikin University publishing group has had during its five years. Herald & Review/Kelly J. Huff