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Bill Ardis  
photo by Nick Young



## Breaking into the Book Business

By Heather Darrow

**BOOKS ENLIVEN OUR WORLD,** enlighten our minds and quietly inform us of things we did not know or could not possibly imagine. They whisk us away to private conversations among the most guarded individuals, allow us to understand challenging concepts and expose historical figures on an intimate level. The ultimate form of communication, these countless hardbound or paperback objects let millions of authors convey their innermost reflections and their personal thought processes. Ironically, books even share the details of the colossal business endeavor that they themselves embody.

Bill Ardis always wanted to be a writer, and while his dream has been realized, many people know him better as a professor of

mathematics at Collin County Community College District (Collin). Professor Ardis is the author of 23 published books and manuals. His latest endeavor was a two- to three-year project compiling multiple files for a calculus solutions manual.

Professor Ardis, who has been teaching at Collin since 1986 and has taught at the Frisco campus since its inception, has been paid both flat fees and royalties for his work. Like many of his colleagues, he found that writing a book was a natural evolution from teaching. However, getting his foot in the door was not an easy task. He attended conferences for aspiring authors where he stopped to talk with book representatives and acquisitions editors. He began his writing career in 2001 when his name was

recommended as a potential author for an online graphing calculator text.

“You develop your ideas from years of teaching experience. One of the reasons publishers want faculty to write books is that they know what is going on in the classroom; they know what techniques work,” Professor Ardis said.

Writing and teaching make wonderful companion positions, according to Professor Ardis. His teaching and writing simultaneously improve as he pursues new techniques and hones his technological skill. Today, he is adept at working with screen capture programs, software that allows him to bring the exact image of a document on a computer screen into a book or onto a slide for class discussion. In addition, he uses graphics in his Calculus III classes to help the students see the three dimensions in math.

Each published piece brings back memories of the day he glimpsed his byline on his first published manual.

After working as an author evenings, weekends, holidays and throughout the summer, he rejoices in the final product. Each published piece brings back memories of the day he glimpsed his byline on his first published manual.

“It is neat feeling. You are an author. It is fun to write, to get your thoughts down on paper. It forces you to organize things. It has helped me as a teacher because I can see the process,” Professor Ardis said.

For his writing projects, Professor Ardis uses Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop and Acrobat; Microsoft Word; EXP, a math word processor; MathType, an equations editor; Mathematica, a computer algebra program and TI Graph-Link, a screen capture program for graphing calculators.

Professor Ardis warns prospective authors that they will have learning curves with each text. He believes one of the worst pitfalls is underestimating the time it takes to write a book. He develops different processes for each project, which makes the first few chapters much more time consuming than the rest. He also advises writers to search for exceptional publishing companies with editors that truly assist you and staff members that answer any questions you might have.

“One of the key things is finding a publishing company that has good people. I work with a technology guy that knows everything. I have yet to stump him,” Professor Ardis said.

#### A GLIMPSE FROM THE EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

William Hoffman, senior acquisitions editor in advanced mathematics for Addison Wesley and Professor Ardis' book editor, has been in the book publishing business for 35 years. After dining repeatedly with million dollar textbook authors, he has discovered a common element. They all share a special modesty.

“When a young person asks them whether they knew they would be so successful, they all have similar answers. They say, ‘actually I thought there were many books out there that were better than mine; I had no idea this would be part of my future.’ They don't have that cockiness. I learned that the humility is real and it allows them to get inside of their students' minds,” Mr. Hoffman said.

According to Mr. Hoffman, writing isn't just about listing facts and concepts. Rather it is teaching people how to learn, how to figure it out for themselves. He looks for writers who have already begun to write books, who continually revise their syllabi and are not satisfied with the books on the market. He searches for individuals who try new things, have passion for their fields, know students on a first-name basis and most importantly can write with confidence even though they cannot see the actual reader's face, like they can when they teach in class.

“I have met great professors, but reading what they write is like cutting cheese with a straw. Some teachers, on the other hand, have the talent but do not have the patience and fortitude to put up with rejection. I can tell you that this is not

easy. Good writers are learners and are very aware of themselves, their place in the world and the classroom. That awareness lets them step outside of themselves and teach the students as they are coming to grips with the material. Bill Ardis is a gifted teacher with a lot of passion and humility. He can't fake it. He simply is who he is,” Mr. Hoffman said.

#### THE SCHOLARLY PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

Dr. Levi Bryant, Collin philosophy professor, is in the process of publishing *The Transcendental Empiricism of Gilles Deleuze* with Northwestern University Press. Dr. Bryant is interested in the French philosopher's work because he theorizes being, or reality, as a process that is constantly becoming and creating entities and new forms of life.

“I wished to participate in scholarly discussions with the larger academic community. Deleuze has had a good deal of impact in literary studies, film studies, political theory, biology, chemistry and physics, but no one has yet approached him purely as a philosopher. I wished to give a clear picture of his philosophy to help those struggling with his demanding work,” Dr. Bryant said.

Dr. Bryant describes the progression of publishing a book as a long, glacial process. He researched Deleuze for five or six years before writing the manuscript. Before his book was initially accepted in 2004, he submitted letters of inquiry with sample chapters to various publishers. According to Dr. Bryant, once the head editor reads a book, he sends it to outside readers who are familiar with the subject matter, and they write reports on the work and offer suggestions, if necessary. Though his book has required little revision, working with numerous individuals has slowed the process down. He hopes his



Paul Bryant (above); Pete Brierley (below)  
photos by Nick Young

Debra St. John  
photo by Nick Young

book will be available for purchase in 2007.

### WRITING BORN OF NECESSITY

Technology has played a fated role in Collin Convergence Technology Professor Pete Brierley's writing. Simply put, he writes because the classes he teaches are so new that they frequently do not have appropriate published materials. The day that Professor Brierley called Thompson Publishing with the hope of finding a text for his Microsoft Windows class, he was

surprised when they asked him to write the textbook and instructor's manual; however, in retrospect it was the perfect solution to the problem.

"I used the material I was writing and passed it out in class. I got a lot of feedback from the students. A number of them asked me to sign their books, though some told me they would have me sign the books if they didn't need to sell them to buy books for the next class," said Professor Brierley laughing.

Today, he is part of a National Science Foundation grant that is attempting to resolve the lack of teaching materials for several high-tech subjects. He is leading a group of colleagues who are developing syllabi, learning labs and assessments for convergence technology. Additional Collin professors are developing material on Voice Over IP and home technology integration for nationwide distribution to lessen the delay for much needed teaching material.

### CAUTION BOOKS ARE WRITTEN HERE

Dr. Debra St. John, author and Collin professor of political science, is spending her summer reading banned books as part of a study grant offered at the college. The reading and research will give her the opportunity to expound on civil liberties in



her government classes.

"Books are important because they are dangerous. They bring out new ideas; they encourage individuals to think on their own. Some books do all of the thinking for you as propaganda. Books can make you think outside the box, and they can put you in a box. A textbook whets your appetite; it is that sample platter. It is the opening of the door for a lot of people," Dr. St. John said.

Actually I thought there were many books out there that were better than mine; I had no idea this would be part of my future.

Dr. St. John has published three editions of the *Texas Politics Supplement to American Government* as well as an instructor's manual titled *The Struggle for Democracy* and a study guide titled *Essentials of American Government*.

"Being a professor is not the same as

being a school teacher. I teach my class, but I also should be doing some research and writing. After research, the numbers come to my head more readily, and I can say 'here is why' when I show the results. You discover these little stories about people and incidents, and my research goes beyond the books, which gives more credence to what I say," Dr. St. John said.

Dr. St. John published her first book in 2002. She spends a lot of time checking the accuracy of her books because politics is continually changing, like the vetoes that can occur up to 20 days after a legislation session ends. Currently, she is working on a book with a professor from the University of Texas at Arlington that will include stories behind political events as well as provide cartoons and references to relevant movies. Her goal is to create a book that students liken to television in your head.

"I would give up a lot of things before I would give up my books. They take your intellect places and stretch you beyond what you think you are capable of. The more you educate yourself by reading, the more accepting you are, the more global your thinking, understanding and compassion become," Dr. St. John said.

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Heather Darrow is a writer for Collin County Community College District.