

How to Turn Your PhD Dissertation into a Successful Book

PhD candidates usually spend countless hours working on their dissertations. While doing so is a labor of devotion, there is nothing wrong with maximizing the efforts by turning your dissertation into a book. In fact, at the heart of many successful academic books lies research conducted as part of a PhD. Nevertheless, dissertations are not ready-to-go books; they are just a starting point, albeit a very good one. Converting the entire PhD dissertation into a book requires that your dissertation covers a topic of interest to a large enough audience of scholars. Anything that is useful only for examiners (e.g. literature review, methodology discussion) in a dissertation should be heavily amended. In addition, your book is not going to sell itself. For that, you will need a book prospectus to locate a publishing house. Most academic publishers and university presses specialize in a specific area of scholarship and particular types of books and audiences; you therefore have to find a reasonable match. In the end, submitting the manuscript is a huge step toward getting a book published, but this is just the beginning of a long, collaborative process as the manuscript will undergo peer review, copyediting, typesetting, and marketing. In this newsletter, we are very fortunate to have Dr. Grace Mou and Professor Kim Davies for dispelling the myth of publishing books with academic publishers. I appreciate their support beyond words. Enjoy reading!



[Dr. Grace \(Yu\) Mou](#)
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[Professor Kim Davies](#), Dean and Professor of Sociology
Pamplin College, Augusta University

1 What is your new book about?

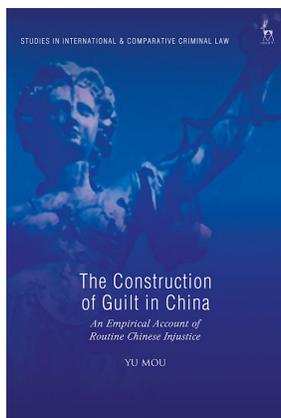
Dr Mou:

Professor Davies: In *The Murder Book*, I include a broader and deeper coverage of the theoretical explanations for homicide than can be found in other places. Discussions of the extraordinary murders featured in the popular texts on the market are included while at the same time, providing a more extensive and realistic view of homicide by also examining the more ordinary homicides that occur every day. Finally, unlike existing texts, there are details about how investigators work homicide cases and how they are dealt with in the courts, thus providing a complete treatment of homicide. This is the text for those wanting a broader and more rigorous academic treatment of homicide that goes beyond what students learn through popular media presentations on murder.

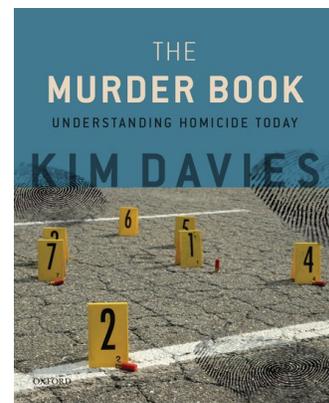
2 What was your biggest challenge when writing this book?

Dr Mou:

Professor Davies: This version published by Oxford University Press is marketed as a first edition as I wrote a similar/previous edition under a similar title for Prentice Hall 15 years ago. Prentice Hall gave me the rights to allow me to move publishers and Oxford agreed to publish this edition. Therefore, I would say, the challenge was updating to include so much that has happened in the last 15 years. In the field of homicide studies, the focus for student interest used to be on serial killers and there was less “popular” attention on mass murder. I had to completely update and rewrite that chapter. The other chapter that was personally most challenging is the one on defining murder – definitions and degrees. This chapter was a challenge because of the various difference in laws throughout the United States (and the world) and the nuances in the laws. Luckily for me, I had a reviewer who was a stickler for detail who helped me immensely with this chapter.



[The Construction of Guilt in China](#), Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2020
Winner of the 2020 SLS Peter Birks Prize for Outstanding Legal Scholarship



[The Murder Book](#), Oxford University Press, 2021

3 How to ensure a book proposal is as good as it can possibly be?

Dr Mou:

Professor Davies: Please know my advice is based on my experience in writing textbooks only but I would say have others read your book proposal if possible, to make sure it makes sense and it is good to have someone not familiar with the topic but who could understand it, read it. Make sure you are familiar with possible competition and really explain how yours is different and/or better. Also, follow the advice/outlines given by the publisher. Give a strong sample chapter and it is good if you can provide a preface or introductory chapter that tells where you are going.

4 What factors shall we consider when choosing a publisher?

Dr Mou:

Professor Davies: Try to find a reputable publisher that your university will see as worthy of your time and effort. Talk to your mentors/chair about your ideas of where you might publish. I like working with Oxford University Press because they specialize in academic publishing, and they are nonprofit. They have scholars in the field review your manuscript. I think I had something like

ten reviewers read my work which is amazing and amazingly helpful to insure it is worthy of publishing and then respected. Be ready for lots of editing and you either pay for the indexing or you do it yourself and it is not easy. I paid the second time after I did it myself the first time. Finally, as you likely know, at some universities, textbook publishing and even book publishing is not something that helps you get tenure as much as grant writing/journal articles. I did not start writing a textbook for that reason until after I had tenure— make sure you know the expectations where you are.