

An UNCOMMON DECADE

Over the past ten years the students of Stance have worked with 160 external reviewers (from approximately five hundred applications) and one thousand manuscript authors from approximately 140 universities in thirty-five states and thirty-one nations including: Bolivia, Cameroon, Czech Republic, Colombia, Croatia, Hungary, India, Iran, Japan, Lebanon, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Romania, S. Korea, and Slovenia.

Because of this international experience, the Stance staff read a wider variety of philosophy content than any faculty can provide. By evaluating at least fifty manuscripts with our intensive criteria, Ball State students' writing skills immediately and markedly improve. By staffing an exhibition at major philosophy conferences, writing revise and resubmit letters, copyediting, and producing the highest quality print version of the journal, Stance students learn about academia and the publishing business in unparalleled ways. And, I can't resist saying this, they learn to love each other by working in such a collaborative environment.

Beyond multiple national awards, international reach, and professional grade practices, what truly sets Stance apart

from other undergraduate journals is that all of the papers it publishes are original scholarly contributions to the field. Each year Stance rejects amazing papers because they are too "undergradish"; they are predominantly exegesis or synthesis. The journal's name, Stance, signals that the papers in it argue for original conclusions—they take a stand.

How did Stance get to where it is today? It started with Gina Schouten who, as President of the Ball State University chapter of Phi Sigma Tau, was looking for an honor's thesis project. She noticed that Phi Sigma Tau exists to (1) promote student interest in research, (2) provide opportunities for the publication of student research papers, and (3) encourage a professional spirit and friendship among philosophy students. With both audacity and humility, she determined that the BSU chapter of Phi Sigma Tau should start an undergraduate philosophy journal.

For two years Gina guided a team of Ball State University philosophy majors to publish an in-house journal. During this time, Gina and other members of those editorial teams (notably Bob Miller, Ryan Gessler, Tim Pierz, Mike Reynolds, Chris Coy, and Josh Savage) laid the

groundwork for everything that *Stance* has become. They developed documents and practices for multiple rounds of anonymous review. They built templates for our correspondence and wrote “How To” guides for future staff members.

As luck would have it, concurrently, Ball State University was seeking to expand its commitment to experiential learning. BSU wanted to offer more courses that positively impact external stakeholders while simultaneously providing students with learning opportunities that prepared them for various professions. With generous grant funds provided by BSU, we were ready to take *Stance* nationwide. But first, I went to talk with BSU’s Director of Research, Bob Morris, about national norms in undergraduate research to make sure we did this right. He challenged me in two ways: “Why not make it international? And why not include an external review board?” I asked the majors if they thought we could do this, and they, perhaps a little naïvely, said yes. The external review board would have to wait until the second year, but from its inception *Stance* has been fully international.

That first year was a whirlwind. We had not fully anticipated how much work was involved in publishing an international journal. We turned to Professor Mark Neely in the English department to help us figure out how to develop copyediting practices and Dr. Jen Palilonis in the journalism department to teach us the basics of print journal design and layout. Interestingly, that first journal includes poetry about philosophy and even an original song written and performed by Erin Walton. We received ISSN numbers from the Library of Congress, developed “first right to publish” processes, and built the digital

repository for free online access to *Stance* in perpetuity.

To this day, I cannot believe how much work our first editor-in-chief, Kristen Ruhl, poured into *Stance*. Largely because I didn’t know how to do a number of things, we wasted lot of time this year on things that seemed like they would be really handy but which were, in fact, a waste of time. That first year’s staff sifted and winnowed through so many ideas that everyone associated with *Stance* since owes them a hearty “thank you” for how much easier they made everything for years to come.

Part of the design of *Stance* is to have each year’s staff add to or improve some aspect of the journal. Here’s a quick rundown of the upgrades. In year two we began soliciting, training, and taking input from external reviewers. In year three, we did something tedious and outrageous. The staff generated a list of email addresses of every associate and full professor of philosophy in the United States. That’s right, we went to departmental websites to cut and paste, and cut and paste, and cut and paste. The result was an email distribution list of approximately six thousand philosophers. Sending our call for papers through this list, we began to receive over one hundred manuscripts per year. A few years later we remade to list to include all philosophy instructors in the United States. A few years after that we added every philosophy professor email address we could find from predominantly English speaking countries around the globe. Our current email list is larger than that of the American Philosophical Association. Also in the third year, we began listing in *The Philosopher’s Index* and inked a distribution contract with EBSCOHost so that

Stance is available in academic libraries around the world.

In year four, we brought in more external reviewers, developing two teams—one to read approximately twenty-five papers in December and another to read approximately three revised papers in February. Year four also saw a major revision in how we lay out the journal. We experimented with including book reviews. There is a good one in Volume 4, but we received so few we decided to not have book reviews going forward. We also developed and attempted some marketing strategies, but ultimately abandoned them because they bore so little fruit. The one part that did work was to seek donations from Stance alumni, and they continue to generously support the journal each fall.

Year five was one of consolidation. No one outside of the Ball State students who led Stance will ever see it, but we completely revised our internal, cloud-based document center. We polished every internal procedure and document. Our website began to truly take shape this year. “The grid” illustrating the disposition of each paper’s position in the review process was born in year five. Every single operation of Stance has been much easier ever since.

In year six, Ashli Godfrey led us in adding the “interview with a famous philosopher” section, which would grow to include the likes of Marilyn Frye, Charles Mills, Linda Martin Alcoff, and Russ Shafer-Landau. For this, Ball State students collectively read the entire corpus of the philosopher they select to interview to develop interesting questions. We have a video conference with the philosopher and publish the transcript. We also had a powerhouse design person this year, Liz Palmer. She produced the first substantial change to the cover design and started the

practice of having a more creative and competitive design process. She constructed new exhibit materials and started the practice of making shirts for each year’s staff.

Rachel Crawley joined Stance in year seven and quickly earned the title “copyeditor extraordinaire.” She helped authors improve their papers, and I honestly can’t find any errors in either of the volumes she edited. Another interesting thing about this issue is that you can see how the composition of the editorial board influences the journal. While Stance is always open to papers on any topic, using any philosophical methodology, this volume is more “continental” than most of the others. We also began a partnership with The Philosophy Documentation Center, which now publishes every article in Stance.

In year eight, architecture students took over the production aspects of the journal. The cover design became more three-dimensional, and the “flippy heads” in the bottom corner of each page rotated when flipped. We added a “supporters” page to make sure that our thanks to our donors are properly recognized. Importantly, we also began our partnership with the Steven Humphrey Student Philosophy Colloquium at the University of Louisville. Our students attend the conference and work with one or two presenters to try to bring a paper from the conference to publication. In year nine, we presented a poster about Stance at the American Philosophical Association, and Kayla Williams led us through a major website upgrade. We received over 140 manuscripts, leading to a six percent acceptance rate. We still provide constructive feedback to the author of every manuscript we receive.

When Stance began, I described it as a pre-professional experience where students learn philosophical content and skills that are difficult to acquire other ways. Now I just say, Stance students—those at Ball State and our external partners—make the best undergraduate journal in the world. The annual, student-driven push for innovation and enhancement promises decades more of excellence. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to Stance: Ball State University, authors, staff members, external reviewers, donors, publishers, professional organizations, and more, especially every past Editor-in-chief: Kristen Ruhl, Cassandra Reed, Chris Hoover, Lorrie Caskey, Rosamae Swoape, Caleb Mosier, Kiley Neal, Kevin Mager, Ben Rogers, Adam Vaughn, Christine Baker, and Cameron McNeely.

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