

## Chapter 3

# Using Experiential Learning to Elevate Black Voices: Analyzing Howard University's Journal, *The Amistad*

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### ABSTRACT

*Students taking higher education humanities courses value hard skills to succeed post-graduation. The author, who serves as both managing editor and faculty advisor to Howard University's literary arts journal 'The Amistad,' models how this can be achieved through the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). By relating the core principles of ELT (concrete learning, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation) to a creative writing course that workshops student writing and produces a literary arts journal, the author provides an analytical template for other HBCUs courses to follow or expand upon. The chapter also unpacks the importance of reworking the creative writing workshop to one more in-line with HBCU demographics and a stronger assessment on the choices which govern student's creative writing process(es). This chapter's purpose is not to persuade but help interested creative writing instructors start or consider ways to assist young Black writers, publish more diverse authors, and provide marketable skills to students.*

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## **ELEVATING BLACK VOICES THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND PUBLISHING *THE AMISTAD***

### **Examining Howard University's Literary Arts Journal**

As many humanities programs and English departments are increasingly seeing their budgets decreased and enrollments flounder, it's important to create spaces for students to learn practical skills that can be used beyond the classroom – particularly regarding creativity. The prestige of investigating the universal human condition through the written word seems to have lost its cache to computer screens of binary code. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Humanities Indicators project found that many major state and private institutions had their humanities graduation rates fall by nearly half between the years 2012 to 2020, and that “the study of English and history at the collegiate level has fallen by a full third” (Heller, 2023). “Due [in part] to larger structural shifts in the economy, the rising status of STEM degrees and the diminishing place of literature in the culture as a whole” (Mintz, 2023). The pressure for undergraduates to learn hard skills to pay back loans and advance in their future careers is a common concern. As a result, they overlook the value of a humanities major because analytical aptitude and rhetorical awareness are seldom seen as profitable in the “real world.” Therefore, those within the humanities programs – especially English – may need to reframe how they teach their course offerings.

One such option is by engaging students in experiential learning opportunities that show how the humanities are used, appreciated, and economized in the real world. Students can create and manage their own university literary arts journal. This type of space can provide an opportunity for students to use hard skills through reading, writing, judging, designing, and publishing content. According to Poets & Writers (2023) there are currently 117 journals that exist in Master of Fine Arts programs at universities across the United States; however, undergraduate literary journals are harder to identify because many are started by eager students and are often abandoned due to turnover, insufficient funding, or lack of experience to run these types of publications. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) are no exception. Currently, no HBCUs offer a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. While Black students are looking for spaces to read about poetry and fiction that revels in their styles and needs, they are often limited to a handful of journals or are only seen in a thematic February issue.

Howard University's literary arts journal - *The Amistad* - offers students a safe classroom setting to workshop their own work, learn about publishing, and create a journal while earning academic credits. *The Amistad* is Howard University's premier student-run literary arts journal. Its mission is to elevate the creative voices of the

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