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Movers and Shakers in the Library Publishing World Highlight their Roles: Interviews with Print and Electronic Journal Editors - A Comparison

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Abstract

This paper reports the interviews of five Emerald Group and three electronic journal editors. Several topics were discussed, including the definition of a peer reviewed journal article, the role of the editor, the work involved in editing, the role of the editorial board, ways to get on the editorial board, the acceptance rate of the journal, and topics of interest for future publication. The experience provided insight into the working mechanisms of journal publishing and clearly showed that there are many similarities among the editors' roles, relationships, workloads, and understanding of the peer review concept, no matter which format is considered.

Introduction

Since the 1970s when many universities began extending faculty status to academic librarians, articles and editorials have been written about the importance of peer reviewed library journal articles and the various aspects of the refereeing process. Perhaps it is the variety of ways an article can be peer reviewed, by whom, and the format of the article that makes this seemingly simple concept somewhat elusive. Thus, when Emerald Publishing invited one of the authors to meet the Emerald editor of *Collection Building* at the 2004 American Library Association meeting in Orlando, it was felt there was no better time to learn about the peer review process in particular and the editorial process in general. To broaden the conversation, the authors contacted four additional Emerald editors and editors of three electronic journals by phone after the annual conference. Because of the proliferation of journals published via the

Internet, the advanced mode of Ulrich's in August, 2005, lists 4,449 in a keyword search under the heading library science, and because there is no reason to believe there will not be a continued upsurge of electronic publications as we move forward, an understanding of the similarities and differences between print and electronic journal editorial processes is important. This understanding can help in moderating the concerns tenure and promotion committees have toward the quality of e-journals so that they can come to equate e-journals and print journals. In order to ensure that the same questions were asked of all the editors, the authors developed a questionnaire with ten questions prior to the annual conference. The questions were meant to glean information on how editors define peer review, on a variety of aspects related to being a journal editor, on the contributions of the editorial board, and on topics of interest for future publication.

Literature Review

The authors wanted to read pertinent literature about editing, publishing, and peer review, before developing their questionnaire. An online search of Library Literature led to several useful articles. One is by Barbara J. Via (1996), which provides an especially good springboard for thinking about the peer review process because she: a) identifies several authors who have written about various aspects of peer review, b) articulates the overall goals/outcomes of peer review and the actual process of peer review, c) provides general and specific definitions of peer review, and d) lists concrete examples of "misinformation" about peer reviewed journals, e.g., when a journal is reported to be peer reviewed when it is not.

The problem of identifying a peer reviewed journal is addressed more fully in Bachand and Sawallis' article (2003) "Accuracy in the Identification of Scholarly and Peer-Reviewed Journals and the Peer-Review Process Across Disciplines." Here they compare the accuracy of Ulrich's and *Serials Directory* in identifying peer reviewed journals and conclude that there were significant differences between the two. In their view, Ulrich's more closely mirrors journal information. Bachand and Sawallis assert that the best place to identify whether a journal is peer reviewed is from the journal's Web site or from the publication itself. Indeed, "author guidelines" in different journals provides requirements for manuscript submission, discuss the reviewing process, and include information about whether the journal is peer reviewed. Regularly publishing the guidelines for authors is one of the fourteen components Josette Anne Lyders (1993) finds to be a consistent trait of peer reviewed journals. Lyders's work is important because it provides an overarching description of journal editing and the peer review process. More specific information can be found from editors like Peter Hemon and Candy Schwartz (2001) for *Library & Information Science Research* and John

Richardson (2002) for *Library Quarterly*, who wrote editorials about peer review and the process as it relates to their particular journals.

Some articles about electronic publishing and the peer review process present models from various disciplines. One example is Ann C. Weller's (2000) paper, which gives a clear description of the peer review process, both in traditional and electronic environments. She presents specific models for medicine, high-energy physics theory, and psychology. In addition, she summarizes the debate on the change that traditional peer review may need to undergo for e-journals and highlights the tenure and promotion aspects of electronic publishing, especially the acceptance of the new medium by university committees. Cronin and Overfelt's brief communication (1995) directly touches on the bias against electronic publishing and reports from an English department survey on the specifics of what is to be considered when identifying quality. Another recent article that highlights the prejudice against articles published in e-journals in terms of tenure and promotion is by Chamberlain (2003), who interviewed the editor of the *Internet Journal of Chemistry*.

The Interviews

A summary of all the interviews, including the in-person one at the annual meeting and the others via the telephone, is given below.

1. How did you become an editor?

Of all the questions asked, this question elicited the most diversity between the online editors and the traditional print journal editors. The responses of the two groups showed a clear distinction. All three e-journal editors conceived of publishing their journals and initiated the process in the 1990s. Their reasons for beginning these journals centered on retaining independence and on covering subjects that were not dealt with by other journals. Providing a resource for an international audience and publishing on a shoestring budget were also factors. One of the editors was even approached about joining a group of electronic journals. On the other hand, the editors of the print journals stepped into their positions as part of established journals, mostly through their previous work for the publications, either as a board member, author of submitted articles, or column editor. These executives were approached with a job offer when the previous editor left and accepted, either as editor or co-editor. Another way one of the editors was chosen was by personally knowing an editor who wanted to retire. A fifth editor answered a "call for an editor" found on the Internet. Phone interviews followed, and he was selected.

2. How do you handle both your professional and editorial positions?

The print editors' and the e-journal editors' answers were fairly similar. Both groups indicated that a lot of work is involved in editing, and much of it occurs at night or on weekends during personal time. One e-journal editor stated that her library and journal responsibilities are integrated, and the work with the journal is considered a service project. Another online editor and a print editor remarked that their publishing work was valued by their universities and constituted professional development. Indeed, one print editor even stated that he negotiated the journal responsibilities into his job description/library position as part of his professional development efforts. Now his job performance review depends on his continued good work as an editor.

3. How much work is involved in editing?

With the exception of one editor, all others indicated there is a tremendous amount of work to be done. One stated that more work was required when getting started, but then a routine was developed. Some of the editors discussed the process of receiving manuscripts, sending them to reviewers, and making the final publishing decision.

4. How does one get on the editorial board?

The two groups of editors shared a consensus of opinion on this question. In most cases, editors were selected after first contributing articles or columns to the journal on a regular basis. Another way was to ask to be on the board, a third method was to be a colleague of the editor; while a fourth was to respond to listservs when posted. One print editor stated there is no board, but there is a group of consulting editors. Another print editor stated that there are generally twelve to fifteen people on the board and twelve to fifteen people who review articles. Discussing what members of the board do led to question five.

5. What does the editorial board do?

Those editors with boards indicated that board members often serve as peer reviewers, assist in looking for potential authors and articles, attend conferences, and discuss trends. This is the case for both print and e-journal boards. For one of the traditional journals, the board members write a column for the journal; and for one of the electronic journals, board members help with editing, markup language, being Webmaster, and promotion.

6. An article is reviewed by two reviewers. Would you say that means refereed or peer reviewed?

This question caused a little confusion. Two of the editors were quick to point out that their publications are not peer reviewed. One editor replied that her board members are peers and serve as referees for articles. She emphasized that her journal uses a double-blind process, while another editor replied that one blind reviewer reads the manuscript. One editor was asked if an article is considered peer reviewed if only the editor evaluates the manuscript. She said “no.”

7. In your view is there a difference between the terms refereed and peer reviewed?

Six of the editors, some from each group, thought the two words were interchangeable. One editor expressed the opinion that the peer review process means that the editor sends articles to the board; while the term refereed means that people are reviewing the work, though they might not be peers. Another editor suggested that the problem of defining the terms stems from a lack of clear understanding of exactly what each means.

8. What is the acceptance rate of your journal?

Once again, print journal and e-journal editors gave similar answers to this question. The acceptance rate ranged from 50% to 90%. Some editors reported that the acceptance varies from year to year and a few articles are rejected. A comment from one of the e-journal editors dealt with the fact that sometimes people look down on electronic journals and want to know if it is refereed and indexed. He is working on the journal’s credibility, and it is now indexed in LISA.

9. Are you in *Cabell’s Directory of Publishing Opportunities in Educational Curriculum and Methods*?

Most of the editors interviewed were not sure if their publication was listed in *Cabell’s*. Two of the editors mentioned that their publications show up in ACRL’s InPrint.

10. Is there a topic that you have not gotten that you would like to get?

- Assessment and measurement
- Metadata issues
- Networking technology in European countries
- Articles that show thinking outside the box
- Articles showing creative solutions
- Collection assessment

- More on the impact of putting a collection in storage
- What happens when there is a move from print to electronic material
- E-books
- Novel ways of introducing technology.

Conclusions

This project proved most interesting because it introduced the authors to some of the “movers and shakers” in the library publishing world and highlighted the roles they play. In addition, responses to this survey spotlighted the fact that traditional print journals and e-journals were more similar than different from each other in terms of the editors’ and editorial boards’ roles, relationships, workloads, and utilization of peer review. Though, of course, there were some differences in responses among all those interviewed, the biggest being that the e-journals have only recently been initiated versus well-established print publications, the real surprise was that the format of the journal did not seem to matter that much when considering the function of the editor and board. Thus, though questions still abound and concern is expressed regarding the acceptance and/or equal weight given by tenure and promotion committees of peer reviewed articles published in electronic journals, it appears that as time moves forward this attitude will surely dissipate because there is a parallel quality to both types of journals.

Quality is the operative word; and when considering the six variables identified by a department of English as reported in Cronin’s and Overfelt’s communication (p. 701), the e-journals that were considered for this study generally met three of them: “ratio of acceptance to rejection, editorial board membership,” and “refereeing policy (number and standing of referees typically employed).” The authors of this paper did not evaluate two of the variables, “special emphases of content or method and prestige of other contributors” because there was no generally accepted method of critically examining these two factors. Thus, the only criterion that e-journals did not meet in comparison to established print journals was “longevity and currency.” But that is only true for part of the criterion, for electronic journals are current because the Internet can instantly be broadcast to readers over the entire world and seemingly publish articles that fit into the global landscape. In addition, as time passes, the longevity question will no longer be a concern for the e-journals will eventually have their own history to prove their worth.

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