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Florence A. Hamrick

Iowa State University, florence.hamrick@gse.rutgers.edu

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Learning by Editing a Scholarly Journal*

Florence A. Hamrick

After serving two three-year terms as a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of College Student Development*, I was nominated by a colleague for the position of editor that was to become vacant the following year. Had this colleague not nominated me, I am confident I would not have nominated myself. Accordingly, I would have missed out on a set of significant learning experiences that have taught me a great deal thus far about journal editing, about leadership and professionalism, and about myself. It seems somewhat premature writing about these experiences and working conclusions, much less offering this essay for publication, since I am still learning after two years into my work as a journal editor. It will also be a challenge to make it through this essay without citing references to what learning “should” be or “should” entail in order to determine the extents to which I’m measuring up as a learner. But that is not the point of this essay. Educators know that reflection is an on-going process as well as a process of discovery. Additionally, we know that reflection is best engaged while learning experiences are in process and not solely retrospectively. So, I will regard this essay as a progress report on learning and hope that you will regard it this way as well.

One principal thing I have learned is that editing a journal involves taking all available opportunities (and creating additional opportunities) to bring the journal to the attention of people who may be interested in its contents and may be interested in contributing their own manuscripts for consideration. The *Journal of College Student Development (JCSD)*, the official journal of ACPA: College Student Educators International, is the leading refereed higher education journal emphasizing research on college students in higher education. JCSD is published six times per year and reaches 10,000+ individual and institutional subscribers. Electronically, JCSD is available through Johns Hopkins University Press’s Project Muse and is indexed within the Social Sciences Citation Index. Reports on

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About the Author

Florence A. Hamrick is an associate professor in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. Her research interests center on women in higher education, professional ethics, predisposition to college, and the experiences of non-dominant and traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education. fhamrick@iastate.edu

empirical studies constitute the vast majority of the articles appearing in JCSD, and these studies utilize a range of approaches and methods. JCSD's manuscript acceptance rate is approximately 15%. These items are some of what you should know about JCSD.

Aside from learning to promote the journal at every opportunity, what else have I learned thus far as a journal editor? Perhaps the most important thing I have learned—or more precisely—have had reinforced, is something that educators already know full well: people are most central to the success of just about any endeavor. The individuals with whom I've been able to form partnerships are critical to the continued success of the journal. Some of the more obvious and immediate partners include the associate and managing editors, designated representatives of the publisher and, and designated representatives of the sponsoring association. Some of the less obvious partners include those with editorial board members and others who contribute to the substance and the production of the journal. In my estimation, effective educators and educational leaders recognize that the professionals with whom they work at all levels are experts in their own right, and recognizing and respecting the expertise of one's work colleagues fosters high quality processes and outcomes.

Importantly, the individuals responsible for the most important work of a journal *volunteer* their time and expertise to improve the quality of scholarship—in this case, one manuscript at a time. Despite the multiple and pressing demands on editorial board members, reviews most often contain detailed, targeted, and thoughtful feedback to authors that could not have resulted from a perfunctory manuscript scan. I have learned that editorial board members take this volunteer commitment very seriously. For my part, I have learned to listen carefully to their advice and judgments; the expertise is clearly apparent and the commitment to the journal is obvious.

Another set of expert partners are manuscript authors. A great deal of satisfaction and prestige can accompany publication of one's work, and a great deal of disappointment or frustration can accompany the rejection of one's manuscripts. I have learned from manuscript authors that their primary

motivation and reward appear to be contributing to the base of research and scholarship available to their fellow researchers and professionals. I have developed a greater appreciation and respect for the depth of scholars' commitments to advancing a knowledge base.

Although the work of publishing a journal is shared among a number of experts and contributors, I have also learned that being a journal editor is a role, like any other, that one grows into and helps to define along the way. I have thus had the opportunity to learn more about myself in these processes surrounding role "fit." For my part, I have learned that, in most cases, editorial responses or decisions need not be reached or delivered prematurely. Without indefinitely prolonging a process, when a potential decision does not feel "settled," I have learned to take time for additional deliberation or consultation. If taking this additional time is someone else's indicator of weakness or indecisiveness, I will live with that since I know that deliberation is, for me, a primary source of strength. Although it is easy to deliver welcome news about manuscripts, I have learned better how to deliver potentially disappointing news. Most decisions are ultimately the editor's to make and to communicate, and respect must be extended if partnerships are to be sustained.

I have learned that more effectively compartmentalizing my attention and segmenting my own time must be primary goals, since it turns out to be difficult for me to switch gears quickly between "editing" work to my own writing and scholarship. The different kinds of attention and focus demanded by each have simply not been compatible, particularly when the "editing" part of my brain creeps over to scrutinize early drafts of my own scholarly work and finds them woefully lacking. Although I have agreed to undertake the *role* of editor, the role must also breathe and bend to incorporate elements of my own strengths, styles, and preferences if I am to be a successful editor and accomplish this work, as well as my other work, with integrity.

Educators know that learning is a process, and that we as educators as well as learners make continual adjustments based in part on what we learn about a number of things, in any number of ways. We engage in continual processes of doing, thinking, evaluating, reflecting, feeling, and coming to working conclusions and understandings that guide us to learn still more and re-evaluate what we think we know or have gained. Most discrete learning experiences eventually come to an end. What have I learned about being an editor, about editing a journal, about leadership and professionalism, and about myself? Ask me again after my editorial term ends.