

Can Academic Journals Survive the 21st Century?

When I agreed to take on the role of Editor-In-Chief of CJSAE a year ago, I had little idea of what would be involved. It never occurred to me that academic journals are created on faith, sustained by good-will, and ultimately rise or fall on the strength of an unspoken contract among a relatively small group of people—a contract that says the dissemination of knowledge matters. Over the past year, as the journal moved from the University of Saskatchewan to St. Francis Xavier, I have had a glimpse into how fragile this unspoken contract actually is.

It is tempting to think these are the best of times for journals. In Britain, the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* has had to increase the number of issues it publishes from four to five per year due to the number of manuscripts they now receive. In the US, the *Adult Education Quarterly* has an unprecedented number of accepted articles waiting to be printed. The editors of the newly established *New Zealand Journal of Adult Education* report they exceeded all of their publishing goals with their first two issues. Meanwhile, Canada's CJSAE reached a milestone in May 1997 by becoming 10 years old. This was truly a tribute to those who created and sustained this journal. The high hopes we have as a new editorial board could not be contemplated without their earlier commitment to the dissemination of knowledge. And, our hopes are indeed high.

The Antigonish Editorial Co-operative seeks to achieve three goals: sustaining—even enhancing—the overall quality of CJSAE, building a more consistent track of on-time publications, and implementing a global marketing plan. With the invaluable help and advice of Francophone Editor, Paul Bouchard, the editorial board feels it is positioned to achieve these objectives. All of the Anglophone editorial decisions and functions are now centralized at St. Francis Xavier. With the manuscript co-ordination of Associate Editor Leona English, we believe authors and reviewers will find the review process to be an expedient one. Under the direction of Associate Editor Dorothy Lander, we have an extensive marketing plan. John Reigle brings a background of professional editing to the Managing Editor's position. To sustain and enhance quality, we are increasing the consulting editors from 20 to 40, and expect to include even more scholars world-wide.

However, for CJSAE to survive and flourish—indeed for academic journals to survive the 21st century—planning alone will not be enough. I have come to believe that success will be determined by the commitment of those involved, including readers, authors, and editors alike. And, the future

tests of our commitment will be many. Some (mainly on the internet, not surprisingly) are contending that the 21st century will see the end of print-based journals. Journals such as CJSAE are already a print-based anachronism waiting to be “cyberized”—that is, if they can survive their own archaic contradictions. As most academic journals avoid the possibility of becoming for-profit publications, they consciously place themselves in the vulnerable position of forever seeking subsidies. However, these cannot be just *any* subsidies. Unlike public sector or research agency reports, academic journals historically avoid the threat of private subsidies. Instead, they selectively turn to “acceptable” granting agencies with their requests. Always subject to the vagaries of association membership funds and an ever-diminishing number of appropriate granting agencies, the case for ostensibly cheaper electronic journals is becoming ever more persuasive. However, the inherent contradictions do not end here.

Academic journals depend on a constant flow of submissions from researchers and practitioners. The blind review process—dependent on a continuous flow of returned critiques from consulting editors—exists with the sole intention of rejecting a number of submissions. In addition to the inherent masochism of the process, if the acceptance rate becomes too high, granting organizations start to worry about journal quality and their grants become harder to attain. Even more ironic, authors begin to wonder if the journal is “worth” submitting to after all. As if these contradictions were not enough, academic journals do not publish with the intent of being read from cover to cover. Rather, it is typical that readers look to articles in their own areas of specialization and every issue becomes an addition to a living repository of knowledge. Despite these contradictory (even archaic) operating principles, the demand for scholarly publication is increasing. More important, the belief in the value of knowledge dissemination is clearly undiminished.

It remains to be seen if academic journals will survive the internal and external challenges of the 21st century. However, the legacy of faith, goodwill, and commitment to knowledge dissemination already extended to us is greatly encouraging. The Antigoinish Editorial Co-operative looks forward with confidence to the next century and believes Canada’s journal will remain one of the standard bearers for adult education in the years to come.

Allan Quigley