

# The Use of Locally Published Journals to Encourage Undergraduate Research

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In recent years, the principle of authentic assessment has revolutionized the practice of educational assessment. In brief, authentic assessments incorporate assignments that confront students with a real world task that is required of an educated person or a professional in the relevant field (Wiggins, 1993). Because it taps in to most of the educational objectives and goals of a Research Methods class, a comprehensive research paper may serve as an artifact of mastery, or as an authentic assessment of this type of course. A well-executed research project can demonstrate mastery of research and writing skills, the processes of data collection and analysis, and the critical thinking required for a proper interpretation of research. However, such assignments can also be interpreted by students and faculty alike as little more than an academic exercise with little relevance beyond the classroom.

The question is how to redesign the Research Methods project as an authentic assessment that has practical value beyond simply fulfilling a class assignment. One approach is to encourage selected students to publish their research in a journal that accepts research done by undergraduates. There are a number of such publications discussed in the following chapter. Another approach is to take the research project a step beyond the usual class term paper and create a locally-published periodical modeled after a professional peer-reviewed journal. A number of institutions have taken a variety of approaches to developing a locally-published undergraduate research journal (see Table 1).

The possibility of publication encourages a higher level of performance by rewarding excellence in scholarship with publication. It can also provide students with an authentic simulation of the entire publication process as experienced by professionals in the field from designing and conducting research, to writing and submitting an article and experiencing the peer review process. The possibility of publication can also excite students about conducting

research, especially as they read research completed by other undergraduates from their institution. It also provides students with examples of quality research done by their peers which gives them a standard that is perceived as simultaneously excellent and attainable.

Unlike the journals that cater to regional, national, or international undergraduate research projects, this chapter explores locally published journals that typically accept work for publication from their institution only. The publication processes developed at these institutions tend to be idiosyncratic to local needs and desires. This ensures the availability of a workable model for just about any institution that would like to start such a publication. For those interested in investigating the process further, Table 1 provides contact information for institutions who have successfully instituted locally published journals. The contacts at each institution listed in the table responded to my request for information and all were helpful and eager to discuss the process of publication. All of these contacts would be excellent resources for anyone interested in learning from their experiences.

## Type of Sponsoring Programs

Sponsorship of institutional journals varies greatly by institution. Some, such as the one published by the McNair Scholars Program at Penn State University (and many other McNair programs around the country), are housed in a particular program within the school. The McNair program requires dissemination of student research so most programs have some form of a student research journal. Some journals are published through the institutions' Office of Undergraduate Research and publish research from a variety of majors. Others are published by the Psychology Department at the college and limit submissions to Psychology majors from their department.

<b>Journal Institution Contacts, e-mail URL</b>	<b>Psychology Only</b>	<b>Submission method</b>	<b>Editor</b>	<b>Reviewers</b>	<b>Publication Form</b>
<i>WUURD (Washington University Undergraduate Research Digest)</i> Washington U - St. Louis Joy Zalis Kiefer, Kristin Sobotka, <a href="mailto:research@artsci.wustl.edu">research@artsci.wustl.edu</a> <a href="http://ur.wustl.edu/digest/">http://ur.wustl.edu/digest/</a>	N	paper	Staff	Faculty	Paper Online
<i>Journal of Undergraduate Research</i> U North Carolina – Asheville Mark Harvey, <a href="mailto:mharvey@unca.edu">mharvey@unca.edu</a> <a href="http://www.unca.edu/urp/Journalinfo.html">http://www.unca.edu/urp/Journalinfo.html</a>	N	paper	Staff	Faculty	CD
<i>Endeavor</i> U Wisconsin - River Falls Bill Campbell, <a href="mailto:wm.e.campbell@uwrf.edu">wm.e.campbell@uwrf.edu</a> <a href="http://www.uwrf.edu/endeavor/">http://www.uwrf.edu/endeavor/</a>	N	Online paper	Staff	Faculty	Online
<i>Undergraduate Research Journal</i> U Nebraska – Kearney John Falconer, <a href="mailto:falconerj@unk.edu">falconerj@unk.edu</a> <a href="http://www.unk.edu/acad/gradstudies/ugr/index.php?id=5442">http://www.unk.edu/acad/gradstudies/ugr/index.php?id=5442</a>	N	paper	Staff Student	Faculty	Paper
<i>Gardner-Webb Review</i> Gardner-Webb U Chris Davis, <a href="mailto:cdavis@gardner-webb.edu">cdavis@gardner-webb.edu</a>	N	paper	Faculty	Board	Paper
<i>The Undergraduate Research in Psychology and Behavioral Science Journal</i> U West Florida Steve Kass, <a href="mailto:skass@uwf.edu">skass@uwf.edu</a> <a href="http://uwf.edu/argojournal/home/">http://uwf.edu/argojournal/home/</a>	Y	Online	Faculty Student	Student	Paper Online
<i>Oshkosh Scholar</i> U Wisconsin Oshkosh Susan Surendonk, <a href="mailto:surendon@uwosh.edu">surendon@uwosh.edu</a> <a href="http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/6650">http://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/6650</a>	N	e-mail	Faculty Student	Faculty	Paper Online
<i>Columbia Undergraduate Science Journal</i> Columbia U Gabriel Morris, <a href="mailto:cusj@columbia.edu">cusj@columbia.edu</a> <a href="http://cusj.columbia.edu/">http://cusj.columbia.edu/</a>	N	Online	Student	Faculty Student	Online
<i>The McNair Journal</i> Penn State U Teresa Tassotti, <a href="mailto:txt6@psu.edu">txt6@psu.edu</a> <a href="http://www.gradsch.psu.edu/diversity/mcnair_jrnl2006/open.html">http://www.gradsch.psu.edu/diversity/mcnair_jrnl2006/open.html</a>	N	Online	Staff	Staff	Online
<i>Initial Forays into Psychological Science</i> John Brown U Rick Froman, <a href="mailto:rfroman@jbu.edu">rfroman@jbu.edu</a> <a href="http://acadweb.jbu.edu/psychology/IFPS/IFPS.htm">http://acadweb.jbu.edu/psychology/IFPS/IFPS.htm</a>	Y	e-mail	Faculty	Student	Online
<i>UW-Lacrosse Journal of Undergraduate Research</i> U Wisconsin – LaCrosse Aaron Monte, <a href="mailto:monte.aaro@uwlax.edu">monte.aaro@uwlax.edu</a> <a href="http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/">http://www.uwlax.edu/urc/JUR-online/</a>	N	Paper e-mail	Faculty	Faculty	Online CD
<i>The New School Psychology Bulletin</i> The New School for Social Research Daniel Antonius, <a href="mailto:Antonius@nspb.net">Antonius@nspb.net</a> <a href="http://www.nspb.net">http://www.nspb.net</a>	Y	Paper e-mail	Student	Student	Paper
<i>Berkeley Undergraduate Journal</i> U Cal Berkeley Leah Carroll, <a href="mailto:haas_scholars@learning.berkeley.edu">haas_scholars@learning.berkeley.edu</a> <a href="http://learning.berkeley.edu/buj/">http://learning.berkeley.edu/buj/</a>	N	Paper e-mail	Student	Student	Paper

## **Curricular Integration**

All of the surveyed journals, except one, were published as an extracurricular activity. Only John Brown University publishes the journal as a part of the Psychology Department curriculum for students at varying points in their undergraduate experience. At this institution, research articles are submitted for consideration by members of the lower division Research Methods class. The upper division Research Seminar class acts as the peer review board (using a detailed rubric) to advise the faculty editor about which articles will be published. The instructor of the Research Seminar acts as the editor and makes final decisions on which submissions will be published based on the peer reviews of members of the class. The circle is complete when the published journal is used by students in the following year's Research Methods class to model research for various class assignments.

## **Processing Submissions**

Locally-published institutional journals have various policies on who can submit research for publication. Departmentally-published journals generally limit submissions to students in the department. Journals sponsored by an interdisciplinary office of undergraduate research, usually allow students to publish research from a variety of disciplines. Some institutional publications are not limited to research articles and also encourage other types of scholarly and even creative submissions.

Journals also vary in how submissions are processed. Some require a paper submission while others have some form of e-mail or online submissions. The editor is usually a faculty member working with faculty reviewers but some publications have student editors and reviewers. Some departments involve graduate students in the publication process and some have student assistant editors. Again, each institution may adopt a process that best meets its needs.

## **Circulation Models**

Visible circulation of the journal is a crucial aspect of the publication experience. The two most common modes of circulation are local distribution within the college in a paper format and online distribution from the college's web site; each method has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of a paper format include the possible perception that a paper publication is somehow more prestigious. In

addition, paper journals are more portable and can be perused without the use of a computer. However, a paper journal will have additional publication costs that will have to be borne either by the readers, a grant, a sponsoring program, the department or some combination of the above. Online publications include minimal publication costs, freedom from bookstore or other distribution outlets and wider potential dissemination. Of course, the online format also requires some technical skill and the willingness of the college to make web space available on their institutional web site.

## **Faculty Involvement**

One of the major considerations in developing an institutional journal is sustaining the effort from year to year. As student interest may wax and wane, institutional journals can sometimes vary in quality and activity from year to year. Moreover, student editors and reviewers tend to graduate and move on, leaving a void in leadership for the journal. To maintain more consistent quality and activity level, most locally published journals require substantial faculty involvement in the process. Whether faculty editors work in the Office of Undergraduate Research, in the Psychology department, or in other areas of the institution, it is safe to say that, without commitment from key faculty members, the journal will not last long. The amount and type of work done by individual faculty members can vary widely depending on the institutional model. Regardless of the particular model adopted, faculty involvement is invaluable in providing continuity.

## **Challenges**

Locally-published journals have a number of challenges in common and a variety of methods to address them. First, how will it be organized for sustainability? Although the educational nature of the project calls for the highest degree of student involvement, the continuation of the process calls for the stability of being housed in a department or other university program. At the least, it seems to require significant faculty involvement.

The second concern is the cost of the program. This can be borne by a sponsoring program office or a subscription or some combination of the two. Online publication of the journal is generally much less expensive than paper publication in terms of printing costs. Other production costs are controlled by using student or faculty volunteers or funded program officers to produce the journal.

The third concern is how to achieve quality control. An emphasis on the educational nature of the project would suggest the use of students for as many roles as possible in the publication process. However, a desire for continuity and quality will call for the use of faculty in, at least, a supervisory role in the process.

A fourth issue is the relationship between the journal and the departmental curriculum. Most institutions publish research produced by students as class projects; however, the journal is not usually published as a class project. While the challenges seem formidable, there are many successful examples of successful institutional journal programs. One such success has been found at John Brown University.

### **Case Study of John Brown University**

A unique response to the four challenges outlined above is illustrated by the institutional journal published within the Psychology Department at John Brown University. Its main uniqueness is that it is an annual class project in a required class within the Psychology curriculum. The journal serves as a required reference text for the next year's Research Methods course assignments. Because it is integrated into the curriculum, the project is inherently sustainable.

The cost issue was initially addressed at JBU by producing a paper journal and selling it through the bookstore to students with the rest of their texts. Student authors signed a release that allowed them to retain control of the copyright while limiting the price of the journal to the cost of reproduction. Initially, students purchased the text through the bookstore. However, due to incompatible business decisions and policy changes, this arrangement became too cumbersome and complex.

It soon became obvious that the best solution for all involved was to publish the journal online. Such a solution did not require bookstore involvement, it cost the Research Methods students nothing and it required the least amount of work to produce the journal. The online journal is produced by collecting the articles in electronic format, reformatting them from APA manuscript style to journal style, saving the final product in Adobe PDF format and posting it to the departmental website. There is the further advantage that, with each passing year, the archive of previous issues grows and Research Methods students have even more articles to choose from in completing their assignments. An additional advantage is that any errors found after publication can easily be fixed and the journal reposted.

To ensure quality control, the article review process is built into the syllabus of the upper division Research Seminar course. Small groups of students review all submitted articles based on criterion contained within a detailed rubric. They collectively decide on editorial comments that are forwarded to each author. Each student/peer reviewer also chooses an additional role to play in the review process. The first role is the small group secretary who communicates the group's comments to the professor/editor. The second role is the plagiarism detector which involves taking passages from the text of each article reviewed and doing an internet search to check for possible plagiarism. This person is also responsible to find some of the references listed in the article and compare the original work to the submitted text. This comparison focuses on appropriate paraphrasing and general content. A Reference Checker reviews all of the listed references for accuracy. Internet tools such as PsycINFO aid in this process. Finally an Abstract Checker does a PsycINFO search on the topic of the papers reviewed to determine if the author of the paper is actually giving a correct impression of the state of the current research as it relates to their hypothesis.

Although the faculty person is the editor of the journal and makes the final decision regarding which articles are accepted for publication, the weight of the review process is carried by the students in the class. The largest time commitment for the faculty is converting the documents from manuscript to publication style and creating the completed journal format. This part of the process is fairly tedious and could also be assigned to a work study student or administrative assistant and proofread by the editor. The publication process gives students in the Research Seminar class an authentic but condensed simulation of the journal publication process and a very in-depth understanding of APA style as they compare the student submissions to the evaluation rubric.

The specific model that is best for each institution depends on the size of the institution and whether the journal will be housed within the Psychology Department or in an interdisciplinary program office on campus. The experience of many institutions now confirms that the concept of an institutional journal is very flexible and adaptable to the needs of a variety of institutions and the educational advantages make the efforts to institute it and sustain it worthwhile.

## Reference

Wiggins, G. P. (1993). *Assessing student performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

## Author Note

I thank each of the contact persons listed in Table 1 for their assistance in confirming the details of the publications at their institutions and their willingness to be contacted by readers of this chapter to guide them through the process of developing such a journal at their institutions.