

Undergraduate Student Research Journals: Opportunities for and Benefits from Publication

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Recent years have witnessed an increased emphasis on scholarly development of undergraduate psychology students. Opportunities for presenting research include (a) end-of-class poster and paper presentations (Baird, 1991; Gore & Camp, 1987), (b) department or campus-wide paper reading and poster sessions (Rosenberg & Blount, 1988), (c) regional students' psychology conventions (e.g., Great Plains Students' Psychology Convention and ILLOWA), and (d) regional and national psychology conventions (e.g., Midwestern Psychological Association and Association for Psychological Science).

An extension of this scholarly development has been the pursuit of student research that results in a publication. The results from a study by Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, and Spiegel (1994) reflected the importance for such tangible accomplishments. They reported that research leading to a publication was the most important second-order criterion used for admission to graduate school.

With such emphasis on student research leading to publication, we were not surprised that psychology educators had established several journals devoted to the publication of student initiated research. Our search revealed several journals that published undergraduate students' research. Table 1 contains comparative information about eight journals. Several of the listed journals have a narrower geographical range of students from one or only a few institutions (e.g., *The Undergraduate Journal of Psychology: A Journal of the Psychology Department of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte* and the *UCLA Undergraduate Psychology Journal*). Rick Froman examines several such journals in this book's previous chapter on "Institutional Journals."

One of the journals listed in Table 1 gives preference to Canadian students on interdisciplinary topics of cognitive science (*Canadian Undergraduate*

Journal of Cognitive Science) and another accepts articles from disciplines beyond psychology, including biomedical research (*Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences*). Finally, one journal also accepts contributions from graduate students and faculty (*Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*). Thus, there are several and diverse sources for publication of student research.

The purpose of this chapter was to examine the characteristics and benefits of scholarly publication in three journals (i.e., *Journal of Psychological Inquiry (JPI)*, *Modern Psychological Studies (MPS)*, and *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research (PCJUR)*) whose primary goal is to publish the research of undergraduate students who come from a variety of institutions. The selection of these journals was not a criticism of the previously identified journals, but the intention of this chapter was to concentrate on a sharply defined group of publications.

Inspection of Table 1 reveals that all three journals were established in the early to mid 1990s. Two of the three journals (*JPI* and *PCJUR*) publish hard copies and make materials available online. *PCJUR* limits manuscripts to empirical research, and *MPS* has undergraduate student reviewers. Detailed information about eligibility for contributors and submission procedures is available on Web sites:

JPI <http://jpi.morningside.edu/>

MPS <http://www.utc.edu/StudentOrgs/ModernPsychologicalStudies/submit.html>

PSJUR <http://www.psichi.org/pubs/journal/submissions.asp>

Table 1***Selective List of Journals That Publish Undergraduate Students' Research***

Journal Title (first year of publication)	Publication Format		Type of Manuscript	Status of Reviewers
	Hard copy	On-line		
<i>Journal of Psychological Inquiry</i> (1996)	Y	Y	empirical studies, literature reviews, historical pieces, special features	faculty
<i>Modern Psychological Studies</i> (1993)	Y	N	experimental research, theoretical papers, literature reviews, and book reviews	undergraduate students
<i>Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research</i> (1996)	Y	Y	empirical studies	faculty
<i>Journal of Psychological and Behavioral Sciences</i> (1966)	Y	Y	empirical studies and literature reviews	undergraduate and graduate students
<i>The Undergraduate Journal of Psychology: A Journal of the Psychology Department of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte</i> (1988)	N	Y	empirical studies and literature reviews	?
<i>UCLA Undergraduate Psychology Journal</i> (2002)	N	Y	editorials, research articles, and UCLA professor biographies	undergraduate and graduate students
<i>Canadian Undergraduate Journal of Cognitive Science</i> (2002)	N	Y	empirical studies, literature reviews, interdisciplinary work of cognitive science	?
<i>Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences</i> (2002)	N	Y	experiments, surveys, case studies, and documentary research	?

Benefits

The literature identifies several benefits for students conducting research, including (a) promoting creativity and critical thinking skills (Addison, 1996; Hubbard & Ritchie, 1995), (b) encouraging collaborative learning, (c) refining communication skills (Dunn, 1996; Schapman, 1998), (d) developing enthusiasm for scholarly pursuits (Khersonskaya, 1998), and (e) developing feelings of competence and familiarity with the entire research process (Wolverton, 1998). Benefits for students submitting manuscripts for publication include the previously mentioned benefits for presenting research, as well as (a) refining formal

written communication skills (Lawson & Smith, 1996; Peden, 1991), (b) obtaining feedback from independent reviewers, and (c) enjoying the prospect for formal recognition for excellence in scientific investigation (i.e., publication).

Brownlow (1997) elaborated on the practical and intrinsic rewards from students publishing their research. Among practical skills for students planning to attend graduate school, Brownlow emphasized basic research design, methodology, statistical procedures, and computer uses. Because most graduate programs require rigorous sophistication in empirical inquiry, evidence of scholarly publication indicates the willingness to, and the mettle for, doing research. Most prospective employers are eager to see demonstrable evidence that an individual can

think and communicate clearly. Additionally important is evidence that a prospective employee has demonstrated a “fortitude to tackle and complete difficulty tasks” (p. 84). Finally, Brownlow asserts that there is an intrinsic reward from publishing research. She points out that there is benefit in the pleasure in “knowledge for the sake of knowledge” (p. 84-85).

We present anecdotal reports from faculty about the advantages for students’ involvement in research from mentoring and writing to preparing to enter the world of work.

Mentoring and Writing

Professor A

“One advantage that has emerged from my talks with former students, who are established in graduate programs, is that preparing a manuscript for *JPI* was the only writing task that realistically prepared them for the kind of writing/revision regime required to publish scientific articles. Moreover, the writing and editing that I have done with my students is so similar to what I would do with a colleague that it mirrors the real world of academic publication.”

Professor B

“The student has the rare opportunity to work closely with, and be mentored by, a faculty member. The student’s writing skills will be improved. And let’s not forget the benefits to the faculty member. The faculty member has the opportunity to work closely with, and mentor, a bright student. The faculty member feels a sense of accomplishment by having shepherded a student through the process.”

Communication Skills for the World of Work

“Carol (fictitious) was only a “C” student, but her motivation and interest in research energized her through the whole process. She excelled in planning, conducting, and writing her research project. She presented her project orally at the Great Plains Convention. When she discovered the existence of *JPI*, her motivation prompted her to submit her paper for publication. When her paper was published, Carol was extremely proud. Carol is now a manager with a major Omaha bank. She is convinced that the process of her research project helped her get her present job by demonstrating writing and speaking skills.”

The results of recent publications reinforce and extend those benefits for students. For example, Landrum and Nelsen (2002) conducted a national survey of undergraduate educators from the Council of Undergraduate Research Programs. Respondents rated the importance of each of 40 potential benefits, skills, and abilities to an undergraduate education. Results of factor analysis identified two major themes. The first factor contained items relating to technical skills, such as analyzing data, using statistical programs, preparing a manuscript, and developing questionnaires and surveys. The second factor included interpersonal benefits, including teamwork, leadership and time-management skills, self-confidence, and interpersonal communications skills.

There is evidence that positive results from student research activity can occur in conjunction with early participation. For example, Ishiyama (2002) examined the relationship between participation in undergraduate research among social science and humanities students. A sample of 156 students, who had declared social science or humanities majors, were participants; 27 of those students reported that they had participated in collaborative research with a faculty member. Students completed an inventory that assessed the degree to which they recognized gains in (a) thinking analytically and logically, (b) putting ideas together and noting similarities and differences between ideas, and (c) learning on their own, pursuing ideas and finding information they need to complete a task. Ishiyama reported significantly greater gains among students who had participated in collaborative research with faculty. Those gains were particularly beneficial for first-generation students.

Ordinarily, students pursue scholarly activity inside and outside the classroom with the instruction, direction, and support of their teachers. Are such faculty efforts only for the students’ benefit? We contend that there are also benefits for faculty participation in student research. Schwebel and Tzanetos (2005) pointed out the advantages to faculty involving intensive laboratory experience with premedical psychology majors. Benefits to faculty included working with intelligent, motivated students with strong mathematical and scientific research skills, which enliven the research environment.

More generally, advantages to faculty include: (a) reinforcing and extending their own scholarly skills, (b) establishing and maintaining collegial contacts, (c) developing contacts with faculty from graduate programs in psychology, (d) initiating peer teaching and research collaboration, and (e) increasing motivation for teaching and scholarly

undertakings. Benefits for faculty involvement in student publication include (a) refining APA writing style, (b) improving writing skills, (c) enhancing knowledge and skills for teaching research, and (d) using published student research in the classroom to illustrate concepts and to model effective written communication.

Summary and Conclusions

Encouraging and supporting students' participation in research and publications is congruent with developing and expanding their scholarly skills. There are several journals that appeal to local, regional, or national audiences of undergraduate psychology students. Specifically, we summarized characteristics and numerous benefits of scholarly publication in three journals (*JPI*, *MPS*, and *PCJUR*). Our personal experience and the published literature indicate that faculty involvement in student scholarship is a win-win situation; students and faculty accrue numerous benefits from such interaction.

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