Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers

Towards improved understanding of students and junior scholars as authors, reviewers, editors and leaders in scholarly publishing

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How can we reduce publishing inequalities that are detrimental for students and junior scholars?

In this editorial, we shed light on the process how this special collection originated and evolved towards its publication. We highlight a few lessons stemming from the experience, in relation to the management of the collection, the relationship between the guest editors and the in-house Editorial Board, the peer review process and the findings and new questions generated by the contributions. These are non-exhaustive and do not aspire for an in-depth overview of the contributions, which we encourage readers to engage with in full.

The idea for a themed collection on the role of students and junior scholars stems from several unanswered questions we encountered as editors of a junior academic journal, and which were initially discussed at a dedicated roundtable at the World Congress of the International Political Science Association (2021). For example:

- What are the best models for student and junior scholarly involvement in academic publications and benchmarks to evaluate these?
- How can students and junior scholars from marginalized communities empower themselves and be empowered to reduce inequalities in publishing? What are the responsibilities of journal editors and publishers in this regard?
- How sustainable can self-published journals managed by students and junior scholars be? What are the avenues and best practices of collaboration between such journals and senior, established journals published by professional publishers?

Even though the roundtable generated considerable interest and we were successful in bringing together a range of disciplinary backgrounds from the social sciences (Political Science, Law, Education), we felt the need to broaden its multidisciplinary focus beyond the social sciences. We identified *Learned Publishing* as a prime journal in fostering discussions on this topic. Our idea was welcomed by the Editor-in-Chief, Pippa Smart and translated into a public open call (Learned Publishing, 2021). As guest co-editors, we were fortunate to be joined by Sophie Robinson, also the Early Career Editor of *Learned Publishing*, which ensured a productive interaction between the in-house editorial board and ourselves, and provided the authors with ample contacts to reach out to with queries and feedback requests. The main peer review process was managed by the in-house Editorial Board, with the external guest co-editors contributing with peer reviews of selected manuscripts.

In the call for papers, we invited potential authors to reach out to the guest co-editors with queries before submission, including an offer to provide full (informal and non-binding) feedback on manuscripts before their official submission. We received quite a few queries from prospective authors and encouraged them to develop their ideas in response to the prompts from our

call. We think this is a good strategy to facilitate inclusiveness and openness of the collection to diverse contributions.

Similarly, our open call, while more time-consuming to manage, helped discover new voices and perspectives that would likely have remained hidden with a call only distributed via networks of contacts. We also appreciated the variety of formats considered by *Learned Publishing*: in addition to research articles, those with a contribution that did not amount to a full article could consider a range of alternative formats, which translated into the publication of several case studies and opinion pieces. We hope that, thanks to this process, even those authors whose manuscripts were not accepted, benefited from the experience.

Another core takeaway for us pertains to the interaction between authors, editors and reviewers entailed in the evaluation of submissions. Borer (1997, p. 558) gives a type of testimony that best practices should avoid: 'The entire rejection consisted of a testy ten-word response which included the adjectives "atheoretical," "journalistic," and "trivial." I found it to be offensive, non-professional, and in violation of the basic accepted norms of the peer-review process'. Such reviews are certainly undesirable and may have long-term discouraging effects on the authors. Previous contributions accepted to *Learned Publishing* have gone a long way in improving our understanding of the culture and quality of peer review processes as an integral part of scholarly publishing (Allen et al., 2019; Chong, 2021; Souder, 2011). Importantly, this knowledge also shows that while sometimes the editors cannot prevent superficial reviews to be received, they can mitigate them, such as by combining them with reviews that are more constructive or by providing their own or summary reflections, which offer additional justifications. We believe that the editorial feedback provided to the manuscript authors recognizes the journal editors' 'position of great responsibility' (Starfield & Paltridge, 2019, p. 255).

We would like to acknowledge the excellent collaboration with and support by the in-house Editors of the journal, in particular Pippa Smart and the Early Career Editor Sophie Robinson. They welcomed our ideas with open mind and ensured a smooth partnership thanks to their regular communication and extraordinary efforts invested into the success of this project. Furthermore, we are grateful to all authors who submitted manuscripts or queries in relation to the project.

The collection presents new avenues for discussing junior scholarly involvement in academic publishing beyond authorship of manuscripts, creating interactions between generations of scholars. Over two thirds of the contributions are co-authored, in some cases by several junior scholars or some junior and some senior scholars, thus contributing to collaborations in this form as well. In the process, they introduce a range of well-known and emerging journals that are experimenting with innovative forms of publishing and intergenerational scholarly collaboration.

Thematically, a few contributions focus on students and junior scholars as *authors* from the perspective of journal editors (Nelson and Petrova, Stockemer et al., Vuong, Fankhauser et al.)

or senior scholars who co-author papers with them (Plakhotnik). Others go beyond emphasis on authorship and aim to improve our understanding of the reasons, motivations and benefits of involving students and junior scholars as *peer reviewers* (Lijek et al., Mattison et al., Wang et al.). Several contributions tackle the less frequently discussed perspective of junior scholars taking on *editorial roles* in a variety of journal models developing innovative ways of engaging with senior scholars and the academic community more broadly (Karmazin, Lui, Mattison et al., Plancarte-Escobar and Steuer, Sanghi et al., Stiles et al.). These contributions might be particularly valuable for advancing further discussion on the role of professional publishers in supporting different journal models, and we would be thrilled to see responses from publishers' representatives on the models introduced here (such as that of apprenticeship of junior scholars in senior journals, junior scholars as equal partners of senior scholars and junior scholars as managers and leaders in junior journals).

Yet other contributions open further avenues that the author/reviewer/editor/manager matrix needs to consider: the 'receiving end' of scholarly publishing, that of the readers, among whom students are an important constituency (Xia et al.), and the inequalities generated by academic publishing for junior scholars from a minority background (referred to in several contributions but addressed particularly by Wong and Martensen). We hope that this rich collection will help shed light on best practices beyond traditional disciplinary and regional divisions.

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