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'Originality' Revisited: Balancing Tradition and Agility in *JLSC*

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EDITORIAL

'Originality' Revisited: Balancing Tradition and Agility in *JLSC*

The basic structure and function of scholarly journals have remained largely unchanged since 1665, when the concepts of publisher, editor, and peer reviewer were outlined in the initial description of *Philosophical Transactions* (Zuckerman & Morton, 1971). The traditions that have developed since that time have become almost sacrosanct—journals that diverge from the three pillars of *original submissions*, *blind peer review*, and *editorial authority* (along with the slightly less inviolable fourth pillar of *paper*) are often viewed as lesser by scholars and the committees that evaluate them for promotion or tenure.

In 1665—and even in 1965—these traditions made sense. But as we approach 2015, the 350th anniversary of *Philosophical Transactions*, the value of continuing to uphold these traditions is an open question. Of course, we can easily dismiss the idea of paper as the mark of sound scholarship. The flexibility of digital, online publications, like *Vectors*, the *Journal of Digital and Media Literacy*, and countless others, enable scholarship that was never possible in print. There are also valid questions as to whether a journal, as defined by the three pillars of original submissions, blind peer review, and editorial authority, should continue to exist. The overarching question is this: What value do traditional journals offer to an increasingly open and dynamic scholarly communication process?

While the answer can never be absolute, nor generalized across disciplines that value different forms and aspects of scholarship, scholars have suggested that the 'journal' as it is currently constructed is not fulfilling its value proposition. Priem & Hemminger (2012) propose "decoupling the scholarly journal": allowing the necessary functions that a journal performs—"certification," "dissemination," and "archiving"—to be performed separately, in a distributed environment, with each function tended by those who specialize in that area. Similarly, the recent Episciences Project[1] intends to build journal workflows on top of content submitted to arXiv (Van Noorden, 2013)—again, an attempt to make journals more agile and to integrate them with the reality of scholarly communication today.

Though these proposals to deconstruct the traditional journal are intriguing, the *Journal of Digital Humanities* (*JDH*)[2], created in 2011, has taken aim squarely at one of the three pillars: original submissions. Along with publishing non-traditional 'articles', the approach of the journal is to select "content from open and public discussions in the field [and] encourage continued discussion through peer-to-peer review" (*JDH*). In taking work that is already available from a different venue (e.g. a blog post), providing a 'layer' of editorial and peer review, and then publishing the work as a 'journal article', the *Journal of Digital Humanities* is performing what are, to many authors, a journal's most important functions: critical feedback (peer review) and certification (authority). By recognizing that many other venues exist for sharing and developing new ideas, the *JDH* model begs the question: is it necessary for journals to remain dedicated to original submissions—or do journals' true value reside in providing feedback and certification?

As we have prepared the current issue of *JLSC*, this question has become much more real to us—and has led us to realize how implicitly obedient we as editors have been to the traditions of journal publishing. In our opening editorial, we promised that *JLSC* would be "devoted to [the] open, free and flexible communication of knowledge." However, in practice we discovered that the

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policies we had initially crafted were not consistent with our original intent of openness and flexibility. Rather, the policies are constrained by our sense of responsibility to maintain traditional publishing practices—when our *real* responsibility is simply to provide a meaningful venue for sharing ideas.

We are not suggesting that we will abandon a commitment to quality, rigorous peer review, or editorial authority—we still believe that journals provide value in those areas. But we are less convinced of the value offered by the requirement for "original" submissions, also commonly known as the Inglefinger rule[3].

The current *JLSC* policy regarding the originality of submissions states:

> Only articles that have not been published previously, that have not been submitted elsewhere, and that are not under review for another publication should be submitted to this journal. The journal editors will assume that submission of an article to this journal implies that all the foregoing conditions are applicable. Grey literature (e.g. conference papers, presentations, white papers, etc.) may be revised and submitted for review and publication in *JLSC* if all copyrights still reside with the submitting author(s).
>
> Submissions that are substantially similar to material already available to the public (through a peer-reviewed or non-peer-reviewed venue) will not be accepted, but may be proposed as the focus of a P^2 review[4].

The intent behind this policy was to allow authors to submit 'informal' work that had not been formally published elsewhere, and also to allow work that *had* been formally published to receive additional attention and post-publication review. (We also wanted to ensure that our limited resources were not devoted to 'republishing' work that was already available to the public). However, through conversations with authors and editorial board members, we have realized that this policy does not go far enough toward making *JLSC* a venue where authors can share work of all types—regardless of where it has previously appeared—if they believe it will be improved through our peer review process or simply needs to reach a different audience.

Therefore, effective as of the publication of this issue of *JLSC*, we are announcing a revision to our originality policy:

> Only articles that have not been published previously, that have not been simultaneously submitted elsewhere, and that are not under review for another publication should be submitted to this journal. The journal editors will assume that submission of an article to this journal implies that all the foregoing conditions are applicable.
>
> Grey literature (e.g. conference papers, presentations, white papers, blog posts, and other unpublished work) may be submitted for review and publication in *JLSC* if all copyrights still reside with the submitting author(s). Preference will be given to works for which publication in *JLSC* will expand access or add value to the work. As a professional courtesy, authors should indicate if they are submitting such work, and if and where the work currently appears or has appeared. This information should be shared in the author's cover letter at the time of initial submission.
>
> Previously published work may be proposed as the focus of a P^2 review.
>
> *Note:* As with pre/post-prints[5], it is recommended that a citation to the final *JLSC*-published version be added to the site where the original grey literature is posted (e.g. an institutional or disciplinary repository).

While tradition still maintains a toe-hold (see the prohibition on simultaneous submissions, which is a discussion for another day), we believe this policy provides authors much more clarity and latitude as to the types of content that we will consider for review and publication—and also gives us, as editors, more room to be flexible with authors.

If journals are to remain a relevant component of scholarly communication, they must adapt to the changing ways in which scholars communicate. We are under no illusions that *JLSC* is on the cutting edge, but to the extent that our time and resources allow, we intend to continue to evolve. We are extremely grateful to our authors, our reviewers, our editorial board members, and our other professional colleagues for the continuing dialogue about

how to improve scholarly communication—and this journal. We hope to see that dialogue reflected not only in the articles we publish, but also in the way we publish them.

Isaac Gilman
Co-Editor

Marisa Ramírez
Co-Editor

This issue of *JLSC* marks the beginning of a new publication model for us. In order both to publish regularly scheduled issues and to decrease delays between articles' initial submission and time of publication, we are implementing a hybrid continuous publication model. This means that we will publish the bulk of an issue at one time, but then contribute additional articles to it in the month or two following initial publication of the issue. Our hope is that this will decrease the window of turnaround from peer-review to publication, increase the speed at which new research is shared, and will provide more regular content for readers.

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IN-TEXT LINKS

[1] http://episciences.org/

[2] http://journalofdigitalhumanities.org/

[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ingelfinger_rule

[4] http://jlsc-pub.org/jlsc/authors.html#p2

[5] http://jlsc-pub.org/jlsc/copyright.html