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Strategic Issues for LIS Practitioner-Researcher Journals

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EDITORIAL

Strategic Issues for LIS Practitioner- Researcher Journals

GRAHAM WALTON

New Review of Academic Librarianship

MARIA J. GRANT

Health Information and Libraries Journal

Our intention in this Editorial is to explore some of the key issues being faced by library and information science (LIS) research based journals. We are, respectively, Editor of *Health Information and Libraries Journal (HILJ)* (Grant) and Editor of *New Review of Academic Librarianship (NRAL)* (Walton). The Editorial is very much our shared perspective and does not claim to be representative of all LIS practitioner-researcher journals. Our intention is not to give a theoretical perspective but to give a practical insight into the day-to-day realities of editing a practitioner-researcher LIS journal and how you, as a writer, can use this knowledge to inform your contact with us.

Health Information and Libraries Journal is of international and interdisciplinary interest to practitioners, researchers, and students in the library, information, and health sectors, promoting debate about new health information developments with an emphasis on communicating evidence-based information both in the management and support of healthcare services. It is published quarterly by Wiley. The *New Review of Academic Librarianship* aims to establish the relevance and applicability of theory and/or research for the academic library practitioner. It is published by Taylor & Francis and there are three issues per year.

Ensuring Quality through Peer Review

Both *journals* use blind peer review inviting people with appropriate knowledge to critically read the submitted paper and give a judgment and review

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This editorial was written jointly by both the Editor-in-Chief of the *New Review of Academic Librarianship* and the Editor-in-Chief of *Health Information and Libraries Journal*, and will appear in both journals.

of its current status. The *Health Information and Libraries Journal* invites three people to review each of its reviews or original articles though, in practice, not everyone invited is available to provide a review; therefore, like the *New Review of Academic Librarianship*, only two reviews are typically submitted for each manuscript. The review process is instrumental in enabling your manuscript to be as good as it can be as it provides free and constructive feedback to help you develop your ideas. We use the feedback to produce a synthesized summary of the areas of focus and it is accompanied by a commentary. The peer reviewers provide reviews voluntarily, in addition to their day job; therefore, it can sometimes take longer than is ideal and, occasionally, reviewers agree to undertake a review and then are unable to submit within the time lines requested. Another challenge we face is when reviews conflict and express widely different views. The mix of these factors means that managing the peer review process is a sensitive and time-consuming process.

Copy Flow

A perfect copy flow is the aim for all editors, with at least two issues worth of manuscripts read to go to print at any one time. However, this can be difficult to achieve. Not having enough copy could potentially result in quality being compromised or publishing schedules being missed; conversely, having too much copy risks authors becoming frustrated because of the delay in publishing their work and also that it will have limited currency.

A range of strategies to manage copy flow are adopted over and above relying solely on authors to submit of their own volition. These include commissioning papers, encouraging students' dissertations to be developed into papers, and keeping a watching brief on conferences/study days for presentations that would be suitable (if modified) for publication.

We do have to make decisions to reject some manuscripts, most commonly because they are not within scope for our *journals*; there is no point in wasting a peer reviewers' time to look at a paper that is unlikely to be published. Other reasons for rejection include the ideas within manuscripts needing further development, perhaps broadening the discussion to be relevant to our readers, or needing to be restructured to meet the *journal* guidelines.

With no externally specified deadlines for authors to work toward, manuscripts arrive throughout the year and, working three to six months ahead of time, there is always an issue waiting to be published just over the horizon.

Making It Happen

Apart from ourselves, lots of different people are involved in producing the journal (mostly unseen) including editorial assistants who help ensure the

manuscript moves smoothly through the review process, the team of assistant and feature editors who commission content and correct proofs, the peer reviewers, and the production editor who assists in compiling each issue. We also each have an editorial advisory board that helps shape the direction the journal takes by defining the boundaries of content and ensuring the journal keeps abreast of issues likely to be relevant. The composition of the board also sends out implicit message of the types of content the journal is interested in. Both of us have to be aware of all the different contributions and ensure that everything is coordinated and ensure working toward the same goals.

Working with the Publisher

Both our journals are subscription based and produced by commercial publishers (HILJ - Wiley; NRAL - Taylor & Francis). We are both very much aware that in recent years the open access publishing model has been seen by many librarians as being the future. This can lead to tension and difference in how librarians, passionate about open access journals, perceive publisher based journals. Publishing via author services such as Early View, in which manuscripts are made available to subscribers online as soon as proof editing is complete, rather than having to wait for the next print issue, are steps in this direction. From our perspective, the publishers bring credibility, technical expertise, marketing, distribution knowledge, and presentation skills. For both of us, negotiating with the publisher about what open access means for our journals is an important task.

Social Media

The pervasive nature of social media provides an important avenue for us to use in reaching out and communicating with our readerships, whether it is through RSS feeds of content pages, tweets about manuscripts, or weekly tips about writing for publication. Like Facebook, Twitter provides an almost instantaneous way for us to know if our readers like our content, with retweets, items being marked as “favorites” and comments being generated on *journal* activity. HILJ is well on the way to embedding social media in its work and NRAL is starting down that road.

Therefore, what can you take from these ruminations? Well, although it can be time-consuming, peer reviewing and referees comments are there to help you; manuscripts can be submitted at any time though an artificial deadline to assist your own planning (you do not have to wait until the end of the year!); and journals are a team effort, therefore, directing your enquiries to the correct person and medium may mean a speedier response. We look forward to hearing from you.