

## Editing a Journal; a mini-symposium

Editing a journal isn't as easy as it looks. Encouraging people to write articles about interesting topics, and then assessing what they have written requires a variety of skills. Moreover, journals differ in the specific problems they present to editors.

A panel of journal editors at the American Political Science Association convention in New Orleans in September, 1985, gave ample evidence of the travails of editors – and of the stimulating yet different challenge that each faces. These are illustrated in the three short pieces that follow by Charles Jones, a political scientist with experience of editing an 'official' as well as a specialized journal; Chester Newland, a public administration expert editing a journal that consciously spans practitioners and academics; and the editor of the JPP.

The articles are reprinted from PS, a quarterly for members of the American Political Science Association, volume 19, number 1 (1986).

## On Being an Editor Twice

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Editor, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*

A panel at the recent APSA Meeting in New Orleans brought together a number of editors who were new to their present editing jobs. I attended as the Congress editor of the *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. Earlier, from 1977 to 1981, I served as managing editor of another journal – *The American Political Science Review*. Naturally comparisons between the two jobs were invited at the panel, and I have been asked here to comment on editing two very different journals.

Before taking the job, I had puzzled why the title was that of 'managing editor of the *APSR*'. It did not take long to find out. It truly is a sizeable management responsibility. Speaking for myself, I simply was incapable of *editing* the journal. The discipline it serves is too diverse in terms of subject matter and research methods. It was essential, therefore, that I create processes by which editorial decisions could be made. Being editor of the Association's official journal is a humbling experience. But humility won't get the pages printed. One needs a reliable network of advisers, a system for recovering from the inevitable mistakes, an efficient and effective internal structure for moving paper, and enough

protection to allow the work to proceed. Of course, it also helps to have skilled staff assistants. I had the best. In fact, the APSA still owes Mrs. Kendall Stanley, the editorial assistant during my tenure, more than it can possibly repay.

One thing an *APSR* editor soon learns is that lots of people have opinions about the journal and its management. And, of course, they have every right to those opinions, as well as to the expectations upon which they are based. The journal belongs to the membership, directly as a function of payment of dues, indirectly through the governing body of the Association. The editor is directly answerable to the Council. My goal with regard to this official relationship was simple: keep the *APSR* off the top of the agenda. It was my good fortune to realize considerable success in that regard – particularly after the first few meetings.

The authors, manuscript reviewers, and readers constitute highly diverse groups for the editor to relate and serve. Many editors have commented on the problems and rewards in working with these groups. Suffice to say that the overwhelming majority in each set is reasonable if treated fairly. But you can understand, I trust, that fair treatment is itself a management problem of some proportion when you are dealing with many hundreds of professional scholars.

The problem of balance among the sub-disciplines is a worry of all *APSR* editors – truly it is. Unfortunately, it is not altogether clear what can be done to assure balance. It is difficult, if not impossible, for the editor to create research or to convince those doing it to submit their work to the *APSR* if they are satisfied with other outlets. One may even encounter a charge of pretentiousness in such an effort – if not from authors, then from editors of other distinguished journals.

Now, then, what about editing the *LSQ*? I know that some of you have traveled abroad on speaking tours for the United States Information Agency. Let's say it is February and you are in a cold hotel in an eastern European 'democracy.' Tomorrow you will speak to a few journalists and political scientists at a lunch on a subject chosen for you – a subject you know little about. There will be consecutive translation and so your 33rpm talk will have to be delivered at 16rpm. And you say to yourself: 'God, what am I doing here? Why can't I go home?' Well, *LSQ* is going home for someone who has been out in the cold. It is just such a pleasure to work on a specialty journal in your chosen field of research.

What are the pleasures? First is the time that one has to work with individual manuscripts. Given the fewer number of manuscripts received, it is easier to be an editor, sometimes even suggesting changes that lead to improvements. Second, one can actually have an idea about what ought to be published and encourage that work to be done. It is simply easier to take an initiative with a journal like *LSQ*. Third is the pleasure of looking for papers at the conventions. Most specialty journals have the flexibility of being able to fit a manuscript into the publishing schedule. Fourth, *LSQ* can, and should, encourage young scholars to fashion articles from seminar work or theses and dissertations. A review of the table of contents over the ten-year history of this journal will show that it has performed this role admirably. Fifth are the rewards of working with two such dedicated professionals as Gerhard Loewenberg and Malcolm Jewell. Along with Samuel C. Patterson, they created and nurtured this fine journal. I am the beneficiary of their efforts.

At least in American politics, it is normally not possible for the specialty journal to compete with the prestigious general journals. Thus, for example, the *APSR* will continue to publish most of the best work on Congress. But we can offer

an outlet for the excellent work that is not suitable for the general journal. Further, we can provide highly professional evaluations and normally we are in a position to put the work into print rather quickly. *LSQ* also thinks of itself as representing the field of legislative studies and thus, through the fine services of Michael Mezey, an effort is made to survey the ongoing literature in the field.

In an accompanying essay, Richard Rose explains the complexities of editing an international interdisciplinary journal of public policy. I am overjoyed that he has accepted the challenge of managing such a diverse intellectual enterprise. My present duties are less demanding – because of the journal's limited scope, to be sure, but also due to the effort and skill of my co-editors. The goal of *LSQ* remains what it has been from the start – to publish significant research on legislatures. We want the *LSQ* to be 'the' journal among legislative scholars – one that they must read to do their work as teachers and scholars; one that they will encourage their students to read, perhaps even subscribe to.

## PAR: A Professional Journal for Practitioners and Academicians

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Editor, *Public Administration Review*

The *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*) is the principal journal for practitioners and academicians in the field of public administration (P.A.). From its inception in 1940, *PAR*'s mission has been 'to advance the science, processes, and art of public administration' by linking practice and scholarship. That is also the fundamental purpose of the *Review*'s sponsoring organization, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), which was formed less than a year before *PAR* was first issued. At its inception, ASPA's leadership was more heavily practitioner than academic, and the founders deliberately acted to make it an organization oriented to the *practice* of P. A. William Mosher, the first national president, was an academician, but his next four successors were foremost practitioners. In 1986, that initial orientation to practice still characterizes ASPA; over 80 percent of the Society's members are practitioners.

That fact helps provide definition of *PAR*'s purpose. It does not wholly define it, however. The *Review* was intended by its founders to serve not only as the principal mark of ASPA's professionalism but as a vehicle to advance the quality of practice, research, and teaching of P.A. The *Review* was intended to reach and speak to practitioners, but it was designed also to sustain and rely on scholarship. Its development and out-reach reflect that search for balance.

From its inception, *PAR* editorial processes have been principally the responsibility of an editor-in-chief, assisted by other editors and an editorial board which serves primarily to referee manuscripts. The first editor, Leonard White, was primarily an academician with practical experience; the second, Gordon R. Clapp, was a prominent practitioner. Their 12 successors have been primarily academicians, but some have had notable governmental service. The initial term of appointment by the ASPA president is three years, subject to extension. Two have served longer: Dwight Waldo, 1966-77, and Louis C. Gawthrop, 1977-84.

All articles published in the *Review* are selected through a refereed process, with blind reviews, generally three to six in total, for each manuscript received. Editorial board members do much of the referee work, but other authorities are also relied upon.

Referees are asked to return their evaluations within one month. Publication decisions are made by the editor-in-chief, working with an associate editor and the manuscripts editor. Most rejections are decided within six weeks of receipt by *PAR*. Other decisions rarely require over two months. Publication of accepted articles is usually scheduled for one of the next two issues following final acceptance. The published *Review* is mailed during the first month of the number (i.e., the January/February issue is in the mail in January).

That description of the work schedule reveals only the demanding logistical aspects of *PAR*'s editorial processes. Except for those directly involved in them, those processes remain relatively invisible. What is published in *PAR*, however, is highly visible, and that product is sometimes controversial.

Some of the differences reflect negative assessments of the product. Most simply and often, those controversies have been blamed on inherent conflicts of interests between the *Review*'s two audiences: the practitioners who dominate it as subscribers, and the academicians who dominate it as authors. A few practitioners sometimes object that many articles suffer from academic jargon which obscures a lack of relevant substance and/or methodologically weak research. A few academicians find some published articles deficient in methodology and/or theoretical foundations. From an editor's perspective, both sets of criticisms may be constructive. More high quality research and writing are needed in public administration. That is not an issue which should divide academicians from practitioners, and for most ASPA members and other *PAR* subscribers it does not. But a little name calling between practitioners and academicians has occurred throughout ASPA's history, and it requires persistent editorial attention in *PAR* to keep the focus on the real problem: a need for high-quality work.

Other controversies over *PAR*'s contents have reflected deeper currents in the field, and they have been largely positive. *PAR* was launched in what to many was P.A.'s Golden Era, when the United States turned largely to government to solve social problems. A dichotomy between politics and administration was largely accepted, certainly by the *Review*'s first editor-in-chief. Economy and efficiency were agreed-upon purposes of P.A., and the strong public executive and bureaucracy were the accepted vehicles to achieve them. With success in creation of big government, however, controversies over public policies ushered in an effectiveness era by the 1960s. By the 1970s, a new public administration *demand*ed recognition. P.A. moved in diverse directions in that decade. Fundamental

agreement persisted, however, that government should serve as the great instrumentality to solve social problems.

By the end of the 1970s, agreement on that premise of both the old P.A. of the founders and of the new P.A. of the 1960s-70s was gravely shaken. Today, private performance of public functions has many advocates in P.A. Independent sector activities are a principal part of the field. Attention is again focused on concerns of political science which were often neglected in ASPA's earlier years: distinctions between government and self-governance and a search for reasonable balances between public power and limits on it.

*PAR* serves as a principal publication outlet for searching inquiries into these important dimensions of P.A. It encourages careful reporting of research, experience, and conceptually disciplined analysis. The field is diverse, and varied perspectives are published. At the same time, editorial policy is guided by the values which underlie constitutional democracy and the disciplined inquiry which is fundamental to it. In that respect, the search for reasonableness continues in the *Public Administration Review*.

## Editing an International Interdisciplinary Journal

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Editor, *Journal of Public Policy*

The art of editing a journal is to combine disparate authors and interests in ways that are intellectually satisfying. Editors of the *APSR* have reflected upon the difficulties of balancing the interests of different subfields in American political science, but their task is easy compared to editing the *Journal of Public Policy*. As an international journal, published by the Cambridge University Press, the *JPP* must take into account European and extra-European as well as American perspectives. As an interdisciplinary journal, it is concerned with economists, sociologists, and genuinely post-disciplinary public policy experts, as well as political scientists.

Since such a large fraction of working political scientists in the world are American, it is entirely appropriate that most leading journals are edited in the United States, and most articles are by Americans. Yet however good an article, if it is based upon a very American institution such as Congress, its generalizability can be slight. One test of a science is that its leading concepts are applicable across national boundaries.

The comparative study of public policy is particularly good at highlighting distinctive national characteristics, for what may be regarded as a constant

within a nation can become a variable if viewed cross nationally. For example, comparing the level of taxes in America or the rate of growth in taxation in postwar America with higher levels and faster rates of growth in Europe raises questions about why America has a relatively small government.

New York publishers invariably ask about a foreign book: Does it have legs? That is, can it travel to America and still be of interest? The same question is asked in the *JPP*. We are not interested in the national setting of a piece of research, but in its international relevance. For example, a study about the National Security Council would have limited relevance to other countries, for the United States is an 'n' of one on security matters. An article about budgeting in Rhode Island (not to mention implementation in Oakland) could be internationally relevant, because of dealing with generic problems of political systems.

Ethnocentrism is a normal characteristic of people whose experience, including professional research, is concentrated upon a single country. Journals published in the Queen's English, French, German or other European languages bear as much witness to this as journals published in American. With an editorial board of scholars living in nine different nations, it is easy for the *JPP* to guard against this insularity. An article submitted will be refereed by scholars in two different countries and sometimes in three.

Fortunately, most good articles do have implications relevant in many different national settings. The task of an editor is not to apply mechanical criteria, of geographical representativeness, but to encourage authors to elucidate what is of wide relevance from their national case study and what qualifications might apply to generalizations based upon research in a single country.

A public policy journal is necessarily interdisciplinary, for policymakers cannot segregate the political, economic, and social dimensions of a problem as easily as universities sort social scientists into separate departments. The editorial board of the *JPP* has members from half a dozen disciplines; the dominant fields are political science and applied economics (that is, the empirical study of economic activity of concern to government).

The real test of a journal's interdisciplinary character is whether or not it normally engages in interdisciplinary refereeing. The *JPP* regularly sends out submissions to reviewers in different disciplines, since many matters of concern to public policy are 'undisciplined'. This can be satisfying to all concerned when reviewers from very different perspectives agree about an article. While any good social scientist ought to be able to spot a bad paper or appreciate a brilliant one, disciplinary differences sometimes cause reviewers to disagree. Adjudicating such disputes is the editor's equivalent of the policy-maker's need to deal with conflicting political, economic and social pressures. The object is to maintain professional standards without falling victim to disciplinary vetoes.

An editor not only guards against disciplinary narrowness but also must ask: Does this article say something of interest about public policy to people who are not specially concerned with its particular subject matter, whether health, education, or industrial relocation?

While editing a public policy journal is difficult, it is also very stimulating. Good ideas, like the problems of the contemporary world, admit no boundaries. Problems of public policy unite what academic disciplines and national political

systems tend to keep apart. An international interdisciplinary journal is well suited to nurture a growing invisible college of scholars whose research is relevant in many countries and demonstrates that ideas, like social scientists, can travel across many boundaries.