

A Statement of Ethics for Editors of Library and Information Science Journals

July 2009

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Editorial Committee

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About the LIS Editors Group

The group seeks to provide a collegial and supportive space for editors to engage in frank discussions about their concerns. For this reason registration for the discussion list and attendance at any face-to-face meetings is generally restricted to editors. Although the group has focused on journal editing, editors of other kinds of LIS publications are also welcome to participate.

The LIS editors group advances its work by a discussion list, a Web site (<http://www.lis-editors.org>), and periodic face-to-face meetings. In addition, the group drafted a statement of ethics and best practices for LIS journal editors.

The group has been editor-organized and editor-led from its first meeting, but has received support from the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College and Research Libraries. The associations have provided staff support and technical services.

To receive notices about meetings and participate in discussion with other LIS editors, please email Julia Blixrud (liseditors@arl.org) and introduce yourself, mentioning the journal you edit.

Acknowledgements

This document reflects the work of many individuals and the particular support of two organizations, the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of College and Research Libraries. An early draft of the document was improved by comments and discussion occurring at the meeting the LIS Editors Group, held at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2009. The editorial committee would especially like to thank participants in that meeting: Faye Chadwell, Julia Gelfand, Peter Herson, Sarah Pritchard, Sandra Roe, Scott Seaman, and Diane Zabel. A final draft of the document was adjusted to reflect discussions held at the meeting of the LIS Editors Group held at the ALA Annual Conference in July 2009 and attended by: Faye Chadwell, Julia Gelfand, Peter Herson, Sarah Pritchard, Sandra Roe, Scott Seaman, and Diane Zabel.

Endorsers of the Statements and Best Practices

On Friday, July 10, 2009, in Chicago, IL the LIS Editors Group met to finalize the statements. Individual editors are now invited to publicly endorse the statements. A list of endorsers is maintained on a separate Web page on the group's Web site—<http://www.lis-editors.org>.

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Background

It is common for editors in a discipline to organize themselves and meet periodically to share information and consider best practices. Lacking a formal organization to promote the work of editors of library and information science (LIS) journals, in January 2008 a small group of editors of LIS journals met to discuss common concerns and identify practices that can strengthen the collective ability of the journals to serve the discipline and the professionals who create and apply that literature. Convened by the editors of two journals, Joseph Branin, editor of *College & Research Libraries*, and Charles Lowry, editor of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, these editors and former editors gathered to discuss issues of shared concern and explore strategies for creating an opportunity for editors to convene and consider ethics and best practices. The eight attending editors represented a wide range of high impact journals in the discipline, largely, although not exclusively, association journals.

The discussion highlighted a diversity of practice and a substantial unity of concerns with regard to many issues. After considering some of the kinds of activities pursued by other disciplinary editors' groups and their own concerns, there was a strong consensus that LIS editors would benefit from an opportunity to meet and engage in frank and collegial discussions that would develop into best practice statements and simply to enrich their own roles as editors. Following a second meeting in Anaheim, California, in June 2008, several actions were initiated to advance the development of a set of statements regarding editorial ethics and best practices. A listserv was launched, lis-editors@arl.org, and a Web site for LIS Editors (<http://lis-editors.org>) was created for the group by the Association of Research Libraries. In addition, a small group of individuals volunteered to undertake the drafting of a statement based on an outline developed and approved during the group's 2008 meetings.

In September 2010, at the request of the LIS Editors group, the original statement of ethics and guide to best practices was split into two separate documents. The *Guide to Best Practices for Editors of Library and Information Science Journals* can be found at (<http://lis-editors.org>).

Introduction

Library and information science journals serve a diverse readership of practicing professionals, researchers, faculty instructing future professionals, and students preparing for LIS careers. While readers seek a variety of knowledge and have a wide range of interests and responsibilities, all expect that journals in the discipline adhere to high ethical standards and employ state-of-the-art editorial and publishing practices. In addition, authors submitting work for editorial and peer review similarly expect to be treated fairly, ethically, and consistently throughout the review and publishing process. They seek publications that will provide them with the best possible opportunity to reach their desired audience in the present and into the future.

While journal publishing generally follows norms that are broadly similar across fields, disciplines often develop unique characteristics or practices with regard to their journal

literature over time. These may reflect the particular balance of theoretical and applied research, predominant research methodologies, specific values that may be preferred within the discipline or a host of other factors. In the case of LIS journals, too, some characteristics of the discipline have implications for the journal literature. Practitioner research is common and generally reflects a strong service orientation. By its nature, the LIS discipline is populated with individuals with a high awareness of state-of-the-art publishing practices and technologies and, in many cases, strong opinions about publishing policies. Consequently, LIS authors are perhaps more likely than those in many other disciplines to penalize journals that are perceived as failing to provide up-to-date publishing services or that work with retrograde policies. LIS editors, therefore, need to be cognizant of evolving best practices and remain diligent in ensuring that their journals are offering authors the highest quality publishing experience from start to finish.

While editors are the main audience for this document, authors, readers, and publishers will likewise benefit from a clear and public articulation of a consensus view of ethical behavior and also reasonable and contemporary publishing practices. However, the authors hope that their work will also be useful to editorial board members and reviewers, or anyone involved in scholarly communication.

This document is a statement of ethics that describes reasonable expectations for the appropriate conduct of editors, the peer review process, and authors. The editorial committee believes that all LIS editors, and, where appropriate, authors should adhere to the ethical standards described here.

The companion piece to this statement of ethics, *A Guide to Best Practices for Editors of Library and Information Science Journals*, describes what the editorial committee agrees are reasonable expectations for publishing practices that are of particular concern to the editorial function. The editorial committee recognizes that the state-of-the-art in publishing practices is an evolving benchmark in the digital environment, particularly for journals transitioning from print to electronic publishing. In light of this, the best practices expressed are considered achievable in the current publishing environment, although the committee recognizes that some journals may still be in the process of implementing some of these practices. Rather than expressing a lowest common denominator of practice or describing all current LIS practices, achievable best practices consonant with the values and practices of LIS professionals and researchers are provided.

When a journal fails to conform with ethical standards and best practices appropriate to the discipline, all facets of the editorial function are affected. The editorial function includes the recruitment, selection, and production of publishable articles. With regard to the recruitment function, an editor's effectiveness is affected by the quality of the publishing services the journal supports. Attracting the highest quality work is an inherently competitive activity, and publishers cannot reasonably expect editors to perform it successfully if they are not able to offer authors what they regard as state-of-the-art publishing practices. Expediency in turnaround on review, electronic

availability to readers, wide dissemination, broad support for discovery, long-term access and preservation, and reasonableness in rights transfer agreements are all important to authors. Publications that cannot meet best practices within the discipline present even the best editors with real handicaps as they attempt to fulfill their responsibilities to their journals.

A journal's reputation for equitable review practices similarly affects recruitment of manuscripts. Any lack of well-defined and consistently applied review practices also compromises the selection function. Recruitment and selection are intellectually demanding and indispensable in maximizing the quality of a journal's content. Author communication, negotiation of various issues during the review and publishing process, and the preparation and improvement of manuscripts are integral to the editorial process. Policies consistent with disciplinary norms can help make these activities minimally demanding of the editor's time to allow the editor to focus as much energy and attention on the activities that are entirely dependent on the editor's unique expertise.

By adopting the ethical standards described here and working toward conformity with the best practices identified in the companion piece, an LIS journal editor will be positioned to meet the general expectations of authors and readers within the discipline, allied disciplines, fields, and related professions.

Ethics Statements for Editors, Authors, and Reviewers of LIS Journals

Ethics are principles of conduct or standards of behavior governing an individual or a profession. The integrity of LIS journals rests on the professionalism of its authors, referees, and editors. The statements here describe ethical behavior for participants in the editorial processes of recruitment, selection, and production of publishable articles. Editors should conform to high standards of integrity generally and must also act ethically in their relationships with their publishers, reviewers and editorial board members, and authors. In addition, some principles are articulated for ethical behavior by authors in submitting their work to editorial processes and for ethical behavior by referees in the review process.

Section 1: Expectations of Editors in Executing Their Editorial Functions

The following statements of ethics apply to the conduct of LIS journal editors.

1-1: Editor Integrity

- Editors are expected to adhere to the highest standards of journalistic practice and maintain honesty, integrity, accuracy, thoroughness, and fairness in all dealings with authors, editorial boards, and referees.
- Editors should make a clear distinction between editorials and other opinion pieces, articles, and advertising and ensure that these distinctions are communicated to authors and readers.
- Editors should honor existing commitments to publish papers, where there has been a change of editor.

1-2: Relations with Authors

- Editors should hold authors to the highest standards of honesty, integrity, accuracy, thoroughness, and fairness in their writing and scholarship, including research and its dissemination.
- Editors should maintain editorial control but honor authors' freedom to express independent and diverse viewpoints, with the expectation that authors provide appropriate evidence to support their perspective.
- Editors should establish and maintain a consistent and transparent process for constructive and prompt evaluation of submissions, whether accepted for publication or not.
- Editors should ensure that the integrity and confidentiality of the author's work is maintained while that work is being evaluated for publication (e.g., works should not be discussed outside of the editorial and review process).
- Editors should work closely with potential authors in a transparent and timely manner.

- If the author's submission receives a peer review, editors should not reveal the identity of the referees to the author unless the referee grants permission. If a journal uses double-blind review, the editor, additionally, should not reveal the identity of the author to the referees.
- The editor should communicate the publication process succinctly and act to assist the potential author through the process, regardless of whether an article is solicited from a specific individual on an identified topic or if a manuscript is received unsolicited.

Commentary: Editors should understand that unpublished authors often have no idea as to what is expected of them. Indeed, most have no understanding of the publication process at all. At the same time, many will feel pressure to publish due to the promotion and tenure requirements of their institution. The editor should communicate instructions for authors, information about the peer review process (if applicable), deadlines and author obligations, and options for managing copyright and authors right to the potential author.

1-3: Conflict of Interest

- Editors should avoid all conflicts of interest, as well as any appearances of such conflict.
- Editors should have no personal, financial, or other relationships that are linked in any way that impinges on their responsibilities and ethical obligations as editor.
- An editor should not accept gifts or favors, except of nominal value, from any individual, companies, or associations in fields that the editor's journal covers or from advertisers or potential advertisers.
- Editors should not give favorable editorial treatment to advertisers and potential advertisers because of their economic value to the publications; papers submitted by non-advertisers should receive unbiased editorial treatment.
- Editors should maintain an appropriate professional distance from the solicitation of advertising and the preparation of advertisements.

1-4: Copyright and Author Rights

- Editors should be familiar with their publishers' copyright policies, rights transfer agreements, and policies on author addenda to rights agreement. In addition, editors should be familiar with alternatives options for their authors if necessary.
- Copyright and authors' rights statements should be publicly posted.
- If an editor represents a publisher that does not provide such information publicly, the editor should work with the publisher to create a statement on copyright and author rights for provision to potential authors.

Commentary: Many publishers have copyright and author rights statements on their Web sites, which is a practice editors should encourage. Editors can then easily direct potential authors to this information upon contact. It is desirable that such a statement includes a definition of terms, an explanation on the assignment of copyright, a description of publisher and author rights and responsibilities, and a statement of exclusions to policy requiring written permission from the publisher.

1-5: Instructions for Authors

- Editors should ensure that "Instructions for Authors" statements are formulated and made publicly available, i.e., in the print journal, on a Web site, or both.

1-6: Peer Review

- Editors should inform authors of the journal's peer review practices including:
 - Use of open or blind review
 - Timelines for review
 - Number of reviewers
 - How decisions are made if all reviewers do not agree
 - Role of the editor in peer review.
- Editors should ensure that those (e.g., referees, reviewers) conducting paper reviews have a clear understanding of their obligations and how comments will be shared with authors.
- Editors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that publication decisions match the aims, scope, and criteria of the journal.

Commentary: Peer review can occur by a variety of processes. A public description of the journal's peer review processes is ideal, and a complete explanation of peer review is best communicated as part of the Instructions for Authors. Editors may provide reviewers with style guides, example reviews, templates for conducting reviews, and other tools to inform the preparation of a review.

1-7: Commitments and Deadlines

- Editors should always respond immediately to the receipt of a manuscript, both solicited and unsolicited. The acknowledgment should address the peer review process, the number of reviewers, any page review processes expected of the author during layout, and the timeline involved. The editor should provide an exact timeline for informing the author of the reviewer(s) recommendations.
- If soliciting a manuscript, the editor should recommend a target deadline for submission of the initial draft although it may necessary to offer flexibility if the author cannot meet the assigned date.
- If changes are required for further consideration of the manuscript, this should be specifically stated with the required timeline for submission of the revision. The author should also be informed as to the review process for the revision, e.g., back to the same reviewer(s) or editor only.
- When the manuscript is accepted, with or without revisions, the editor should notify the author immediately, provide an exact date for resubmission of the next iteration, and upon final acceptance, provide an estimated publication date and, if possible, indicate the journal volume and issue number. At a minimum, the editor should inform the author or authors the year in which the paper will be published.
- If, at the end of the peer review process, the decision is made not to publish, the editor should inform the author or authors immediately with an explanation for that decision.

- Editors should respond promptly to inquiries from supervisors and/or tenure/promotion committees concerning the peer review process, whether the work has been accepted for publication (is "in press"), and the importance of the published article to the profession.

Commentary: Often authors believe they cannot publish with a particular journal if the target deadline is not met, and, consequently, effective communication stops. The editor should inform the author that the topic is more important than an assigned timeline.

Section 2: Expectations of Authors in Their Participation in Editorial Processes

Like editors, authors are expected to adhere to the highest standards of practice in research and reporting of research, and in writing and submission of manuscripts.

2-1: Authorship

- Any material submitted must be the author's or authors' own work; it should be original and not published or submitted for publication elsewhere.
- To protect the integrity of authorship, only persons who have significantly contributed to the research or project and manuscript preparation should be listed as co-authors.
- Authors should secure appropriate permissions for reuse of copyrighted material (e.g., photographs, figures).
- All authors of articles submitted for publication assume full responsibility, within the limits of their professional competence, for the accuracy of their paper. Falsified research data are unacceptable.
- Authors should properly cite the work of others as well as their own related work. Plagiarism (the use or presentation of the ideas or words of another person from existing sources without appropriate acknowledgment of that sources) is unacceptable. Authors bear full responsibility for ensuring the accuracy and completeness of citations and bibliographic items.
- Authors are responsible for performing an appropriately comprehensive literature review in preparing their manuscript. They should not rely solely on e-indexes or on editors or peer reviewers to fill in any gaps.
- Authors may list persons who made contributions to the work (but are not co-authors) in the Acknowledgment section along with their function or contribution.
- Authors should list sources of support (grants, etc.) in the Acknowledgment section.
- Authors are responsible for reviewing any editorial changes, including copy editing, to ensure that errors have not been introduced inadvertently. Typically some sort of final layout of an article is shared with the author or authors for this purpose.

Commentary: Authors are responsible for the quality and completeness of their work and should not assume that journals can provide comprehensive copy-editing or citation checking. They can expect that editors will spot check citations for accuracy and completeness. Where copy-editing is performed, it is often done by staff lacking detailed subject expertise and that it is possible for unintentional errors to be made. Thus it is crucial for authors to review all text, figures, tables, etc. to be sure that all remain accurate. Authors should not rely on editors and reviewers to

rewrite articles, create abstracts catch errors, or provide statistical analysis. Where an author has not fully mastered writing in English, editors may require authors to work with (and pay) an outside editorial advisor.

Authors should provide adequate supporting evidence for editors and reviewers to assess the accuracy of the findings and the appropriateness of the intellectual inquiry process used (including any research design or methods) when they are presenting original research.

2-2: Conflict of Interest

- Authors should not submit manuscripts with any commercial intent. Authors should reveal to the editor any potential conflict of interest that may influence the manuscript's content or be affected by the publication of the manuscript.
- Authors should disclose to the editor any commercial associations, contractual relations, proprietary considerations, or personal relationships that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the manuscript.

2-3: Redundant Publication

- Authors should disclose at the time of submission whether there has been any prior presentation or dissemination of the same or very similar material. Prior dissemination does not automatically disqualify a paper, but the editor should make a fully informed decision regarding the novelty of the work.
- Authors should avoid redundant publication (publication of a paper that overlaps substantially with one already published, is under editorial consideration, has been published, or is in press).
- Authors should not submit to the same or different journals more than one paper describing essentially the same research or project.
- Authors should not submit the same manuscript for review to more than one journal at a time.

Commentary: In the Web era it is not possible to provide a universal rule regarding what counts as previous publication. Journal editors differ in their expectations. However, authors should note at the time of submission whether the work is based on thesis or dissertation research, any earlier presentations of the work at meetings or previous distribution through electronic means - e.g., as a preprint. These do not usually disqualify a work for submission, but it is important for editors to be aware of the state of ongoing dissemination of the work. In addition, the cover letter should state that the work has not been submitted elsewhere. When in doubt, the author should consult with the editor and err on the side of disclosing potentially irrelevant information.

Section 3: Expectations of Referees in Executing Their Review Functions

Most scholarly journals use peer review to ensure that the articles accepted for publication meet the journal's accepted standards for quality and to prevent the dissemination of unwarranted claims, irrelevant findings, unacceptable interpretations, and personal views. A peer review process may be open (in which the referees and the authors are identified to each other) or conducted in strictest confidentiality. This latter process may be a blind review, in which either the author or referees are unknown to each other, or double-blind review, in which neither party is known to the other. The

referee's responsibility is to provide advice on how to improve a manuscript and to help the editor judge and justify the acceptance or rejection of the paper.

- The referee must be free of any conflicts of interest that might influence the content or the promptness of the review. When a referee is asked to review a paper and believes him- or herself to be placed in a position of possible conflict of interest, he or she should identify any potential conflicts to the editor so that the editor can determine if these are substantive enough to disqualify the referee.
- Referees should submit their reviews within the time frame specified by the editor.
- Referees should neither share the manuscripts they review nor the contents of referee correspondence without permission from the editor.
- Referees should strive to be fair in their review and to provide meaningful and useful commentary.
- Referees should focus comments on whether the manuscript makes a unique or valuable contribution to the literature, matches the scope of the journal, uses a relevant inquiry process and methods of analysis, draws accurate conclusions, and is well-written.
- Referees should conduct reviews according to standards of professional courtesy. Constructive criticism is expected and should be provided with civility and professional respect.