

Editor/Publisher's Commentary

Kenneth C. Williamson III, Ph.D.

Illinois State University
Normal, Illinois

Introduction

Among some members of the Associated Schools of Construction there seems to be limited or at least restrained enthusiasm for the introduction of a research journal in construction education, others however, rejoice in its arrival. ASC members seem to fall into several distinct groups. Those who publish in journals specific to their professional skill, those who are satisfied with the current level of scholarly activity provided by the annual ASC, and those who need and want more for their chosen academic profession -- construction education. Among the enthusiastic, I have found significant differences in opinions as what should constitute the Journal. The majority of these members only have a vague idea of what it should be, therefore, I hope the following discussion will address some of the current issues and help to solidify the majority into a loyal readership.

In this commentary, I would like to explore some advantages of a reviewed research journal and comment on its inherent strengths. My focus is a narrow one -- restricted to a scholarly research periodical, marketed primarily to construction educators, through an electronic media. In particular, I want only to address a publication whose authors, reviewers and editors are unpaid and unstaffed, and who know the true meaning of volunteerism. Moreover, I want to address the Journal as currently distributed via the Internet.

Why the Journal?

The question is; why publish the *Journal* at all? The fact is that to some faculty within the ASC, journals of any sort are not an absolute necessity, and again, there are others who would consider a publication within an education journal as insignificant. This discussion therefore is not addressing issues of immediate concern to them even though they are professional construction educators.

In the past, the dissemination of scholarly information was presented through a print medium, in that there was no alternative. Within the ASC our print medium is currently limited to the Annual Conference Proceedings and this only began in 1987. With the recent widespread use of computer technology and networks, this new Internet alternative has become available. According to Stevan Harnad going truly electronic can reduce the costs of publishing of a fully edited and refereed journal by 70 percent or more (Harnad, 1995). Although initial networking

and computing hardware and software costs money the editorship needed within the ASC should be considered as a service function to construction education.

In order to be acceptable to scholars, electronic journals must at least offer or exceed the functionality provided by the print journals. The quality control provided by peer review is not dependent upon the medium. Some promote a conservative view of closely mimicking the current paper journal formats and ways of working in an electronic form. The Publication Committee within the ASC has chosen to mimic the print mediums as closely as possible within the *Journal*. However, some visionaries such as Stevan Harnad think that the quality control can be improved, and experiment with models of refereed interactive publications in the form of (refereed) open peer commentary on published work (Harnad, 1990; 1995). Others like Andrew Odlyzko go further, and envision a continuum of peer review, in which publications would gain weight by unsolicited and finally solicited comments (Odlyzko, 1995).

In 1993 John Franks (Franks, 1993) with the Department of Mathematics at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois wrote a paper on an issue similar to the one before us here. I really cannot improve upon his description and analysis; therefore I include his work pretty much intact with editorial inclusions directed to this commentary. There are at least three important functions that a journal can provide beyond mere distribution of text:

The first function is academic certification. The journal's editor chooses a referee or referees to read a submission and attest to its scholarly worthiness. The editor also maintains quality control in non-content areas such as standards for language and guidelines for presentation. This process provides a peer review mechanism for certifying the quality of scholarly work. Academic institutions rely on this process when judging the merits of an individual for promotion or tenure. While an author may have no direct monetary incentive to publish in a journal, the indirect one can be significant.

The second function is document archiving. An author would like to know that twenty or thirty years from now, perhaps after retirement, their work will still be available to other researchers. Additionally, educators in the field would like to have an authoritative version of the author's text together with, at least, a definitive date of its creation. Traditionally, archiving is a function not provided by the journal, but by libraries that purchase the journal and maintain its preservation. The modern shift in information technology allows for ease of electronic storage and access without the downside cost associated with the traditional approach.

The last function discussed here is research marketing. If I simply write an article and make it available from my personal or departmental computer to anyone on the Internet, how will other construction educators know of its content or its existence? In contrast, if I publish in a traditional journal, other educators are much more likely to be aware of my work. This might be because the journal is in their library, on their desk and they glance at its contents on a regular basis. The ASC web pages also provide the previous utility, only within a faster and more accessible media, if accessed on a regular basis.

For a growing number of ASC faculty, the current ASC proceedings publication does not provide academic certification for tenure and promotion. There are construction programs that do accept the current ASC publication efforts because they are a result of a blind review process and are of high quality. The ASC archive is based upon annual conference attendance, and whether or not the institutional copy makes it to the library. Our research marketing is severely limited because of the dependence upon the archival process described above. Access is at best occasional, and probably rare. These three functions, certification, archiving, and marketing constitute the primary value added for the author who publishes in the *Journal*, and the whole of the ASC membership.

There are significant differences between scholarly publishing and commercial trade publishing, as provided for example by the American Institute of Constructors (AIC). Scholars are also the main users of scientific information. The main objective of scholarly authors is to be read by their (limited number of) peers, to influence them and gain academic prestige. The productivity of a academic researcher is usually assessed by the quantity (number) and the quality (prestige of the journal published in) of his or her publications. Since the academic tenure and grants system rewards “productive” researchers, there is also profound but indirect economical reason for writing and publishing articles.

It is in the interest of scholars, both as producers and consumers of peer reviewed journal articles, to have the widest possible distribution with the fewest encumbrances. While a scholar's strongest motivation in selecting a journal for their work will likely be to place it in the most prestigious journal which will accept it, it seems likely that other factors being equal the author will opt to publish in a professionally sponsored journal where the article's exposure is likely to be greater. The Associated Schools of Construction fulfills this professionalism within construction education.

Conclusion

The primary advantage for most consumers of construction education literature will be the ease of access. Member of the academic community may browse the articles and print out any articles deserving of more detailed consideration, without leaving their desk. The advantage to the authors will be a reduction in the time delays inherent in print media publication and the speed of an innovative refereeing process, both providing for approved articles to appear shortly after the peer reviewing process is complete. From an institutional point of view, there is a big financial advantage in promoting nonprofit electronic publications. The cost of producing, distributing, and archiving an electronic journal is smaller than that for a print journal (Odlyzko, 1995). In a time of declining resources and escalating prices for print journals, this is an important advantage.

There are also additional capabilities available with electronic media. For instance, abstracts may be distributed over mailing lists, notifying the reader of the availability of the articles. Electronic links may be made to past and future manuscripts, reviews, and comments on the work in question. And keyword searches may be made to identify articles of interest to researchers and

readers. These capabilities vastly increase the ability of the author(s) and the *Journal* to provide information to the readers.

Editorial Issues

The *Journal's* Editor feels the quality of the construction education pedagogy in its manuscripts is of utmost importance. Therefore the *Journal* has implemented the traditional peer review process in its full rigor. Papers are blind-refereed for quality and correctness, as is done for high quality print media journals. The *Journal* will be governed under the direction of the ASC Publication Committee but will have its own governance Editorial Advisory Board as directed by the *Journal's* bylaws.

From the standpoint of the issues surrounding electronic publication, the Editor has taken the following considerations to be fundamental:

1. The appearance of every paper printed out from the *Journal* will be uniform and appealing. Therefore, manuscripts will be distributed in graphical formats only, using *pdf* and *static html* text and image processing. The manuscripts will be typeset in a traditional format, in accordance with the *Journal's* Style Guide, a statement of copyright, and a registered ISSN.
2. The standards for succinctness in writing will be consonant with those applied by the other journals in closely related academic fields. It is important to follow the standards of consensus in our fields. If these standards change in the future, the *Journal* must change with them.
3. The written record (archive) must be maintained intact in perpetuity. The ASC as the host organization has endorsed this commitment, agreeing to insure the integrity of the *Journal's* archive in perpetuity.
4. The *Journal's* volumes and manuscripts will be fixed at time of publication, with their pages numbered consecutively throughout each volume, in the traditional manner.

In the Editor's view, electronic publication is not a panacea or a superior form of scholarly communication; he feels that these new and innovative technologies are upon us, and for better or worse are increasing use, and confront us with issues and choices we within construction education must react to.

Educational research and scholarly works may be affected more significantly than other fields by this technology change. The highest priority is placed on academic pedagogical collaboration, particularly across institutional boundaries, may be well served by innovative modes of scholarship exchange if it accommodates the special needs of those in different or closely related context settings. The inherently multidisciplinary nature of construction education inquiry should be well suited to the electronic format and media. Concerns are however expressed that these very features of educational research may result in a dispersion or lack of coherence that will make the task of understanding and evaluating research immeasurably more complex.

References

- Franks, John. (January, 1993). What is an electronic journal. newsgroup: bit.listserv.pacs-l, 21.
- Harnad, S. (1990) Scholarly Skywriting and the Prepublication Continuum of Scientific Inquiry. *Psychological Science* 1: 342 - 343 (reprinted in *Current Contents* 45: 9-13, November 11 1991).
<ftp://princeton.edu/pub/harnad/Harnad/harnad90.skywriting>
- Harnad, S. (1995) Implementing Peer Review on the Net. Scientific Quality Control in Scholarly Electronic Journals. In: Peek, R. & Newby, G. (Eds.) *Electronic Publishing Confronts Academia: The Agenda for the Year 2000*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Odlyzko, A. M. (January, 1995) Tragic loss or good riddance? The impending demise of traditional scholarly journals. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* (formerly *International Journal of Man-Machine Studies*), to appear. Condensed version to appear in Notices of the American Mathematical Society.
<ftp://netlib.att.com/netlib/att/math/odlyzko/tragic.loss.Z>