

Setting up an academic journal: Some essential steps

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Abstract: It has been the expressed desire of many educational or research organizations/institutions to create and have a functional and recognized indexed academic journal. This short academic opinion gives an introduction to what an academic journal is and is not, and some essential steps to take to create and maintain a functional and recognized indexed academic journal. It is concluded that every educational or research organization/institution that has not had a functional and recognized indexed academic journal should not only crave but also start the process of having one by following the highlighted steps.

Keywords: Academic articles, Academic journal, Indexing, Journal editor, Journal reviewer

1. Introduction

An academic journal (also known as a scholarly journal, a peer-reviewed journal, or a refereed journal) is a periodical publication in which findings or write-ups that have to do with a particular academic discipline are published ("What is a Scholarly Journal?"). These findings or write-ups can be in form of original research reports, literature reviews, book reviews, social commentaries, case studies, methods or methodologies of research, opinion or discussion articles, short reports or letters, editorials, and the like ("6 Types of Academic Papers and Journal Articles"). According to Wang (2020: 401), academic journals are "vessels to ...exchange scientific research ideas, and disseminate disciplinary knowledge." Although an academic journal is a form of periodical, it is not a newspaper or a magazine (Hussain, n.d.). It is not also professional publications or trade journals that have to do with reports on trends and news in a profession, trade, or industry ("What's the Difference?"). The aim of this short article is not to highlight the components of an academic journal but to present some essential steps that an educational or research organization/institution can take to set up an academic journal to the point of international acceptability and indexing.

2. The steps

2.1. Name of the journal

An academic journal must have a name that it will be known for and recognized. This name must be something that will quickly tell about the organization/institution. The name should be clear, professional in nature, and not too long ("What is a Scholarly Journal?").

2.2. Aim and scope of the journal

Except you are setting up a multi-disciplinary journal, your journal must have an aim and a scope that will make it peculiar. The aim and the scope may be something that has to do with what your organization/institution is known for. If your organization/institution is a department or a faculty in an educational institution, the aim and the scope should relate to the discipline or disciplines of the department or faculty. These aim and the scope should be clearly stated after the name of the journal ("Resources for Editors of Scholarly Journals: Launching a Journal: Getting Started"). On the other hand, you may decide that your journal will be a general journal, which, in the words of Stranack (2008: 9), "may be multidisciplinary, broadly focused, and accepting contributions from many fields of research."

2.3. Suggested editors for the journal

Johnson (2019) and Stranack (2008: 27-40) highlighted some personnel needed to run a journal successfully. There should be an **Editor-in-Chief** or chief executive officer of the journal. On most occasions, it is a ceremonial or honorary office reserved for the head of the organization/institution. Apart from the editor-in-chief, there should be an **Editor** who will be the chief responsibility officer of the journal. The person should be the most actively involved in the running of the journal. Other academics, probably between five and seven and preferably lecturers from the department and cognate departments, maybe the **Editorial Board Members** of the journal. They assist the Editor in running the journal. An assistant lecturer or a graduate assistant (with a minimum of a Master's degree) may serve as the **Secretary** of this board. There is a need for around five to seven senior academics from within and outside the educational or research organization/institution that should serve as **Editorial Advisers**. They are to give periodic advice and guidance to the Editor and the Editorial Board Members. Approved editorial board members and editorial advisers will have to be contacted officially to seek their consent and cooperation.

2.4. Publication frequency of the journal

You have to decide the frequency of the time of publication of your journal. Will it be monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, annually, or any other time decided by the Editorial Board Members or the organization/institution? You have to decide also whether you want to be publishing the journal in volumes, series, or numbers. This will help in referencing the journal.

2.5. Type of publication of the journal

What will be the type of publication of your journal? Will it be only a print journal or online journal, or both? Furthermore, will the journal be a subscription-based journal where people will have to subscribe to have access to its content or an open-access journal that people will freely have access to online? Stranack (2008:9-11) gave more clues to guide in making these decisions.

2.6. Cost of publication of accepted articles for the journal

Will accepted articles for publication be free or have a determined price tag as an article publication charge? If you have a price tag, will the authors have to pay before the article is reviewed or after the review and acceptance for publication?

2.7. Securing ISSN for the journal

Academic librarians in your organization/institution should help secure the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), both for printed and online versions.

2.8. Securing a unique or official email address for the journal

It is advisable to have a unique email address for the journal. This can be created through any of the companies that offer free web-based email services. If your organization/institution has an official website, it is advisable to have a unique email address from the website. The webmaster of your organization/institution should help secure a unique official email address for the journal. It would be best if the journal has a unique website and you create a unique email address from the website.

2.9. Securing a space on your organization/institution's website, other institutions' website or having a unique website for the journal

The ICT unit/webmaster of your organization/institution should help create pages on the organization/institution's website for the journal and accepted articles. Otherwise, you may consult other organizations/institutions that offer similar services to create pages for you on their websites. As mentioned above, it would be best if the journal has a unique website. There are some companies like Afriquetech OJS that offer services of creating websites for academic journals and how to maintain them ("Afriquetech Open Journal Systems"). There will be a page for the journal that will contain the name, aim and scope, and editors (with their affiliations) of the journal. Each volume will have a page in its entirety while each accepted article will be published preferably in PDF with a unique URL. Later, the journal will apply for a unique DOI (or Digital Object Identifier) number. Each published article also should have a unique DOI (Johnson, 2019).

2.10. Reviewers for the journal

The editors should reach out to academics and other experts in related fields to volunteer as reviewers (or referees) of submitted articles (Weiner, 2001: 9). These are the people that will examine, critique, assess, and make sure that the submitted articles meet set standards for publication or need further modification before publication. The services of reviewers may be paid or done voluntarily depending on the policy of the journal and the agreement with the reviewers.

2.11. Call for papers

After all, or most, of the above steps, are done, the editors will call for papers through adverts via personal networks, social media, and by contacting other relevant related organizations/institutions. Stranack (2008:51) explained more about this.

2.12. Collation of submitted papers

The editors will collate and do a first reading of submitted articles to ascertain that they are in line with the aim and scope of the journal. This should be done periodically as the articles are submitted. However, if the editors are targeting a particular time to publish an issue of the journal, there must be at least a period of two months between the submission and publication of papers. This will give the editors and the reviewers some time to decide on the possibility of publishing the submitted papers after following some of the subsequent steps.

2.13. Plagiarism check of submitted papers

Wang (2020: 404) recommended that “academic journals must strictly audit the quality of the papers; prevent plagiarism, fraud and other phenomena; ensure that the papers are scientific, original and standardized; cultivate the author’s research integrity consciousness in the process, and create a healthy and fair academic environment.” Against this backdrop, it is advisable that each author first conduct a plagiarism check on their paper before submission. Every submitted paper undergoes a plagiarism check by the editors. The editors may liaise with the academic librarians of the organization/institution to do this. A paper must not be more than 20% (or less as determined by the editors) in its plagiarism check before it can be forwarded to reviewers. Any paper that is more than 20% (or less as determined by the editors) in its plagiarism check should be sent back to the author for reworking and resubmission.

2.14. Blind peer review of submitted papers

Weiner (2001: 9) opined, “The employment of peer review lies at the center of academic journals’ procedures and practices.” Submitted papers that pass a plagiarism check will be sent to at least three reviewers after every piece of information that can reveal the identity or the affiliation of authors has been concealed for fair, blind peer review. The reviewers must give a comprehensive report of their review. The editors may design a form to be completed by the reviewers after the review. The reports and completed forms will guide the editors in their further decisions on the reviewed article. At least, two of the three reviewers must recommend the paper for publication.

2.15. Editors’ review

The editors will review reports from reviewers and make final decisions on papers to publish. If at least two reviewers do not recommend an article for publication based on their review, then the editors should reject the paper. The editors may give the author the reason the paper is rejected. They may also recommend other journals to the author for possible submission for the article that does not fall within the aim and scope of the journal. The author may have the opportunity of rewriting the article based on the reports of the reviewers and suggestions of the editors and resubmitting the article for another circle of assessment for possible publication.

2.16. Publication of papers

This should be done after the acceptance of articles for publication in line with the next publication time of the journal. The editors may decide the number of articles to be published in a given issue of the journal. It

is not compulsory to produce an issue of the journal if there is no accepted article ready for publication at a given time of publication.

2.17. Application for indexing

After the publication of the first volume (or after a year), the editors should make applications to register the journal with organizations like Web of Science, PubMed, SCOPUS, Google Scholar, and other indexing organizations to give the journal wider coverage and acceptance (Johnson, 2019).

3. Contributions to the body of knowledge

This paper contributes to the body of knowledge by introducing researchers to what an academic journal is and is not. It also mainly gives some essential steps to take to create and maintain a functional and recognized indexed academic journal thereby likely making it easier for an educational or research organization/institution that desires to have a functional and recognized indexed academic journal to create and maintain one by following the highlighted steps.

4. Conclusion

Creating and maintaining a functional and recognized indexed academic journal is very easy if each of the highlighted essential steps is followed conscientiously. Every educational or research organization/institution that has not had an academic journal should not only crave but also start the process of having one by following the highlighted steps.

(This article is an adaptation of a proposal submitted by this writer to the Department of Religious Studies, Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria for creating an academic journal for the department in March 2023.)

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