

Guest Editorial

An Embarrassment of Riches: Ethics and Scholarly Publishing in the Digital Environment



For almost two decades, I have taught courses in what is typically called the “foundations” of my academic fields of education and library and information science. “Foundations” courses, to borrow the language of the Council for Social Foundations of Education, provide students with interpretive, normative, and critical perspectives on their chosen professions rooted in the study of humanistic and social science fields, including history, philosophy, sociology, economics, and political science.¹ During my career, I have taught courses such as “Education and American Culture,” “Philosophy of Education,” “Libraries, Information, and Society,” and “The Internet and American Society.” These are fun courses to teach (and they are always full because they are often required for graduation), but the first and greatest challenge in teaching them is to help the pre-service professional to see the relevance of the topic to the practical concerns that dominate both their education and their concerns about their future work.² And, then there are years like 2012, when it seems there are stories every day that allow me to make clear the routine relevance of foundational concerns. One such concern appearing regularly in the press this year is that of ethics, including scholarly ethics, in the digital age.

In September, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported on faked peer reviews, which they called “the latest form of scientific fraud.”³ There has been broader concern for some time about the value of product reviews in the digital environment, including book reviews,⁴ but the *Chronicle* story demonstrated how the

tactics employed by unscrupulous reviewers of commercial services might be finding their way into the presumably more rigorous environment of scholarly peer review. But, peer review has never been without its challenges, as Lawrence Souder noted in a recent review of the literature.⁵ In an attempt to address a process that Richard Horton of *The Lancet* once referred to as “biased, unjust, unaccountable, incomplete, easily fixed, often insulting, usually ignorant, occasionally foolish, and frequently wrong,” journal editors in a number of fields have come together to promote “a new code of conduct” aimed at combatting ethical lapses in scholarly publishing, including conflict of interest in peer review, data fraud, and coercive citation practices.⁶ We in the community of LIS journal editors applaud these efforts, but would also like to note that we got there first.

In 2008, Joseph Branin, editor of *College & Research Libraries*, and Charles Lowry, then-editor of *portal: Libraries and the Academy*, brought together LIS journal editors to establish a community in which issues of common concern to the promotion of the literature might be explored. Since then, the LIS Editors Group <<http://www.lis-editors.org>> has established an electronic discussion list, promoted a set of “best practices,” sponsored programs at American Library Association meetings, and adopted a “Statement of Ethics” that establishes guidelines for ethical practice among editors, authors, and peer reviewers.⁷ If you have not reviewed the “Statement of Ethics,” now is a good time. It is a good time not only because it will help you to better understand your rights and

responsibilities as an author, reviewer, or editor, and not only because of the recent concerns raised during what seems to be a banner year for ethical breaches in scholarly communication, but also because of the opportunities to explore new models for peer review that are coming to this journal.

C&RL moved some years ago to an online management system for the submission and peer review of manuscripts, for example; a change that Gary Marchionini noted might pose ethical concerns in the publication process (to our knowledge, it has not).⁸ More recently, we have seen broader acceptance in a variety of fields of the notion of “open peer review,” i.e., a peer review process in which there is greater transparency, in which the names of reviewers are made public, or in which the review process may even be “crowd-sourced.”⁹ *Nature* promoted a discussion of open peer review during a 2006 trial, and this model has been explored in a number of journals in the life sciences.¹⁰ The notion of open peer review has become more popular in the humanities, and has been adapted to forms of publication other than the journal article, as shown by the work of MediaCommons Press <<http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/mcpress/>>.¹¹ The future of peer review may (or may not) be “wide open,” but we may be certain that opening peer

review, as well as other changes that may come as we move further into the digital age of scholarly communication, will give rise to new ethical concerns and to new models for best practice in our field.

Beginning in 2014, *College & Research Libraries* will be published online-only, a decision endorsed earlier this year by the ACRL Publications Coordinating Committee and the ACRL Board. We will begin a broader discussion among the *C&RL* readership over the next year about what this change will mean, and what new opportunities we will be able to explore in this new publishing environment. As Marchionini has noted, the move to the digital may cause new ethical concerns to surface, but we feel secure that the work done by the LIS Editors Group provides a strong foundation for continued ethical practice in the solicitation, evaluation, selection, and dissemination of scholarly research in library and information science through our journal. The “Statement of Ethics” provides us all with a starting point rooted in the traditional publishing model, and the members of the Editorial Board and I look forward to engaging you in a discussion of how we can ensure that our commitment to professional ethics remains strong as we move into a new model and explore new opportunities for innovation in scholarly publishing.

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Notes

1. “Standards for Academic and Professional Instruction in Foundations of Education, Educational Studies, and Educational Policy Studies,” Council for Social Foundations of Education, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.uic.edu/educ/csfe/standard.htm>.

2. For a recent example, see: Lane Wilkinson, “On Ethical Reference Service (or, ‘Fishmongers? In my Library?’),” *Sense and Reference: A Philosophical Library Blog*, September 11, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://senseandreference.wordpress.com/2012/09/11/on-ethical-reference-service/>.

3. Josh Fischman, “Fake Peer Reviews, the Latest Form of Scientific Fraud, Fool Journals,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 30, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/Fake-Peer-Reviews-the-Latest/134784/>.

4. David Streitfeld, “The Best Book Reviews Money Can Buy,” *The New York Times*, August 25, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/26/business/book-reviewers-for-hire-meet-a-demand-for-online-raves.html>; Brad Tuttle, “Why You Shouldn’t Trust Positive Online Reviews—Or Negative Ones, For That Matter,” August 28, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://moneyland.time.com/2012/08/28/why-you-shouldnt-trust-positive-online-reviews->

or-negative-ones-for-that-matter/; Shankar Vedantam, "Five Ways to Spot a Fake Online Review, Restaurant or Otherwise," *The Salt: NPR's Food Blog*, September 12, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2012/09/12/160755775/five-ways-to-spot-a-fake-online-review-restaurant-or-otherwise>.

5. Lawrence Souder, "The Ethics of Scholarly Peer Review: A Review of the Literature," *Learned Publishing* 24 (2011): 55–72, accessed October 5, 2012, doi: 10.1087/20110109.

6. Richard Horton (2000), as quoted in Souder, "The Ethics of Scholarly Peer Review," 55; Scott Jaschik, "Journal Editors Promote Pledge of Ethics," *Inside Higher Education*, June 12, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/06/12/journal-editors-promote-pledge-ethics>.

7. Joseph Branin, and others, "Best Practices: A Guide to Best Practices for Editors of Library and Information Science Journals," September 2010, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.lis-editors.org/best-practices/index.shtml>; Joseph Branin, and others, "A Statement of Ethics for Editors of Library and Information Science Journals," September 2010, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.lis-editors.org/ethics/index.shtml>.

8. Gary Marchionini, "Reviewer Merits and Review Control in an Age of Electronic Manuscript Management Systems," *ACM Transactions on Information Systems* 26, doi: 1402256.1402264.

9. "Open Peer Review," *Wikipedia*, accessed October 5, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_peer_review.

10. "Overview: Nature's Peer Review Trial," December 2006, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.nature.com/nature/peerreview/debate/nature05535.html>; "What is Open Peer Review, as Operated by the Medical Journals in the BMC Series?," accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.biomedcentral.com/authors/authorfaq/medical>.

11. Patricia Cohen, "Scholars Test Web Alternative to Peer Review," *The New York Times*, August 23, 2010, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/24/arts/24peer.html>; Beth Mole, "The Future of Peer Review in the Humanities is Wide Open," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 13, 2012, accessed October 5, 2012, <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Future-of-Peer-Review-in/133563/>.

Errata



In the September 2012 article "Give 'Em What They Want: A One-Year Study of Unmediated Patron-Driven Acquisition of e-Books" by Fischer, Wright, Clatanoff, Barton, and Shreeves, the "Total Ebrary Usage (%)" column of the "50–100+" row was transposed. The correct figure is 0.8 as noted below:

We regret the error.

TABLE 9
Total Ebrary Usage for 11 Months

User Sessions	Titles Used	Total Ebrary Usage (%)
1	3,049	32.5
2	2,580	27.5
3–5	1,982	21.1
6–10	1,042	11.1
11–49	661	7.0
50–100+	73	0.8
Total	9,387	