

# Promoting Student Learning and Scholarship through Undergraduate Research Journals

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**ABSTRACT** Previous research indicates that undergraduate research activities promote student-faculty collaborations and have a positive impact on students, faculty, and institutions. A review of 13 active undergraduate political science journals indicates that these publications take a variety of approaches in format, frequency, and submission requirements. Further, a survey of undergraduate political science journal editors shows that the role of students and faculty and the sources of support for journal publication vary considerably. Finally, case studies of the undergraduate journal experience at three different institutions suggest that political science journals promote student engagement and student-faculty collaboration.

Several political science departments have established undergraduate research journals that focus on political science and related fields of study. Although evidence suggests that undergraduate journals and other high-impact undergraduate research activities promote student learning and development, little attention has been paid to the characteristics of existing journals or the editorial and publication choices that must be made when establishing an undergraduate journal.

We present the results of a survey of 13 political science undergraduate journals and provide brief case studies of the journal experience at three different institutions. The survey results show that undergraduate political science research journals vary significantly in format, organizational structure, and editorial process. In addition, the case studies illustrate the different ways that political science departments use undergraduate research journals to promote undergraduate research and faculty-student collaboration.

## THE BENEFITS OF UNDERGRADUATE JOURNALS

The Council on Undergraduate Research defines undergraduate research as “an inquiry or investigation conducted by an under-

graduate in collaboration with a faculty mentor that makes an original intellectual or creative contribution to the discipline (Wenzel 1997, 163).” Undergraduate research experiences have been identified as a “high-impact” learning practice that involves “students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions” (Kuh 2008). Similarly, Osborn and Karukstis (2009) note that undergraduate research experiences, like other forms of engaged learning, are “transformational experiences for undergraduate students (2).”

Kinkead (2003) notes that the National Science Foundation’s list of best practices includes the recommendation that colleges provide “undergraduate research opportunities that are visible, provide support and offer a means of showcasing their products.” In pursuit of this goal, Kinkead recommends that colleges consider undergraduate journals as a means to “disseminate and showcase student work (2003, 10).” For their part, Jenkins and Healy (2010) describe undergraduate research as “global movement” and conclude that integrating research into undergraduate programs should be a core objective of curriculum development internationally.

Undergraduate journals have a positive effect on students, encouraging them to develop an interest in and an understanding of the research process (Bauer et al. 2009; Metcalfe 2007; Smith et al. 2009; Watcke and Winterfield 1979) and inspiring students to do their highest-quality work (Charlesworth and Foster 1996). Participating in the undergraduate journal process enables students to gain experience in the research and writing process (Metcalfe 2007), enhances knowledge and writing skills (Bauer et al. 2009), boosts confidence in research abilities (Russell et al. 2007),

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and increases scientific literacy (Smith et al. 2009). In addition, undergraduate research journals enhance students' communication skills and improve their ability to communicate ideas with the public and others outside of their discipline (Tatalovic 2008). There is also reason to believe that student involvement in the publication process is a valuable learning experience of its own. Yair (2000), for instance, observed that students tend to be more engaged when they are involved in active forms of learning such as publishing.

Undergraduate research also benefits faculty members and academic institutions. According to Osborn and Karukstis (2009), "undergraduate research provides the most natural, and perhaps best, opportunity for faculty members to deeply engage students" by enhancing mentoring and teaching opportunities; achieving research, scholarly, and creative outcomes; and integrating scholarship and teaching (4–5). Colleges and universities benefit because undergraduate research promotes the development of a community of scholars on campus, deepens faculty relationships with alumni, and provides the academic community with a shared sense of purpose and attainment (2009, 7–8). There is also evidence that undergraduate research and other types of faculty-student collaboration promote student retention (Gregerman 2008; Nagda et al. 1998) and strengthen academic development among first-generation college students (Ishiyama 2002).

#### UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH JOURNALS: VARIED APPROACHES

Although numerous examples of interdisciplinary journals that promote undergraduate research exist, our focus here is on journals that focus on political science and related disciplines. The APSA website identifies 15 graduate and undergraduate research journals in the discipline.<sup>1</sup> The Council on Undergraduate Research identifies 86 journals across a number of fields, including five with a distinct political science focus.<sup>2</sup> Using these lists—and the journals at our own institutions—as a starting point, we eliminated all journals without a political science focus, journals that served primarily graduate students, and defunct or out-of-print journals. In total, we identified 13 active undergraduate research journals specializing in political science and related subjects.<sup>3</sup>

As table 1 shows, undergraduate political science journals take a variety of approaches in submission requirements, publication frequency, and editing processes.

#### Publication Format

All 13 of the surveyed journals have an online presence. Although the majority of journals publish exclusively online, at least four journals publish print versions in addition to online content. The web provides flexibility in content; some journal websites are designed to share student research, whereas others promote student writing generally by publishing student essays on political topics in addition to academically oriented research.

#### Publication Frequency

Most undergraduate political science journals publish either annually (six journals) or semi-annually (five journals). The remaining two journals, which publish quarterly, embrace web formats that are geared toward direct engagement of political issues through publication of student essays, photographs, and opinion/editorials.

#### Submission Requirements

Four of the journals limit submissions to undergraduates at their respective institutions, whereas eight allow submissions from undergraduate students regardless of institutional affiliation.<sup>4</sup> In two of these cases, however, all or nearly all submissions come from undergraduates at the respective journal's host institution. Opening submission to all undergraduates can raise the profile of your institution, but it requires substantially greater resources to manage the advertising, editing, and review process.

#### Survey

To learn more about the editorial and publication processes of political science journals, we contacted journal editors and faculty advisors by e-mail and invited them to participate in an online survey. The survey results are presented in table 2. In total, nine of the 13 active undergraduate political science journals responded to the survey (a response rate of 69%).

Two-thirds of the undergraduate political science journals responding to the survey give student editors sole or primary responsibility in the editorial process. In the remaining third, editing responsibility was divided evenly between students and faculty (22%) or rests primarily on faculty (11%). Most (77%) of the journals surveyed have a faculty adviser, although the role that advisers play in the editorial process varies. Of the seven journals with faculty advisers, four indicate that their respective adviser is "very involved" and three report their adviser is "somewhat involved." The selection process for journal editors also varies, although most are selected by faculty members (44%) or students who are active in the journal (33%). Student editors receive course credit for their work on the journal in one-third of the cases, but are nearly always uncompensated for their work. Faculty advisers, with one exception, are similarly unpaid.

Although undergraduate political science journals receive support from a variety of sources, less than half (44%) receive funding directly from their academic institution or department. One-third of journals receive funding from student organizations, whereas a small percentage receives support from outside organizations, professional organizations, or outside donors. Some journals also generate revenue from sales or subscriptions (33%) and advertising (22%).

#### CASE STUDIES

A review of the undergraduate journal experience at three universities illustrates how departments are working to better integrate research into the undergraduate learning experience. In pursuit of similar goals, the departments make very different choices with regard to journal organization and the editorial process.

#### *The Journal of Political Research* (Creighton University)

*The Journal of Political Research* (JPR) at Creighton University was started in 2010 to provide advanced political science majors with an opportunity to serve as student editors on a journal and apply skills learned as a major. The JPR is published annually, with students in the political science department's Advanced Practicum class serving as editors. The student editors review all articles for the quality of the writing, content, and research methods before making the decision to accept an article for publication.

Within the department, students undertake a three-course core focusing on an introduction to the research process, the use of

Table 1  
**Overview of Undergraduate Political Science Journals**

JOURNAL NAME	AFFILIATION	EST.	PUBLISHED	FORMAT	SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS	WEBSITE
<i>Columbia University Journal of Politics and Policy</i>	Columbia University*	1989	Two times per year	Print, but many essays also appear online	Open to all undergraduate students	http://www.helvidius.org
<i>Critique: A Worldwide Journal of Student Politics</i>	Illinois State University	2001	Two times per year	Online only	Open to all undergraduate and graduate students	http://lit.lisu.edu/critique
<i>The Dialectics: Journal of Leadership, Politics, and Society</i>	Penn State Abington	2007	One time per year	Online only	Open to all undergraduates	http://www.abington.psu.edu/dialectics/index.html
<i>Georgia Political Review</i>	University of Georgia	2011	Two times per year	Different editions published print and online	Open to all University of Georgia undergraduates	http://www.georgiapoliticalreview.com
<i>Government and Politics Review</i>	University College Cork (Ireland)	2010	One time per year	Online only	Open to all undergraduates studying Government modules in University College Cork	http://www.ucc.ie/en/government/governmentandpoliticsreview/
<i>Harvard Political Review</i>	Harvard College	1969	Four times per year	Different editions published print and online	Written and published by Harvard undergraduates	http://hpronline.org
<i>The Journal of Political Research</i>	Creighton University	2010	One time per year	Online only	Open to all undergraduates	http://www.creighton.edu/ccas/politicalscience/undergradstudents/journalofpoliticalresearch/index.php
<i>The Michigan Journal of Political Science</i>	University of Michigan	1981	Two times per year	Same edition is published in both print and online formats	Open to all undergraduates	http://mjps.org
<i>Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics</i>	Pi Sigma Alpha National Honor Society**	2001	Two times per year	Online only	Open to all undergraduates	http://www.psjournal.org
<i>The Politic: A Yale Undergraduate Journal of Politics</i>	Yale University	2001	Four times per year	Online (unclear if print version is offered)	Unknown	http://thepolitic.org
<i>The Xavier Journal of Politics</i>	Xavier University	2009	One time per year	Online only	Open to all Xavier University undergraduates	http://xavier.edu/xjop
<i>Northwestern Journal of International Affairs</i>	Northwestern University	1997	One time per year	Online (unclear if print version is offered)	Open to all undergraduate and graduate students	http://groups.northwestern.edu/njia
<i>Critical Theory &amp; Social Justice Journal of Undergrad. Research</i>	Occidental College	2010	One time per year	Online (unclear if print version is offered)	Open to all undergraduate students	http://scholar.oxy.edu/ctsjs

\*The Columbia University Journal of Politics & Society is published by the Helvidius Group, a student organization which, according to the journal website, maintains a close financial and academic relationship with the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy.

\*\*The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics is currently hosted at the College of William and Mary, having been previously hosted at Purdue University and Union College, respectively.

Table 2

## Survey Results on Editorial Process and Funding of Undergraduate Political Science Journals

<b>Editing Responsibility</b>	
Student Editors (Solely)	3 (33%)
Primarily Student Editors, help from Faculty	3 (33%)
Evenly divided between Students and Faculty	2 (22%)
Primarily Faculty, with help from Student Editors	1 (11%)
<b>Faculty Advisor Involvement</b>	
Very Involved	4 (44%)
Somewhat Involved	3 (33%)
No Faculty Advisor	2 (22%)
<b>Selection Process for Student Editors</b>	
By faculty member or academic department	4 (44%)
By students involved in the journal	3 (33%)
By student organization or group	1 (11%)
Students self-select by taking a course	1 (11%)
<b>Student Editors Receive Course Credit</b>	
Yes	3 (33%)
No	6 (67%)
<b>Student Editors Receive Compensation</b>	
Yes	1 (11%)
No	8 (89%)
<b>Faculty Advisors Receive Compensation</b>	
Yes	1 (11%)
No	7 (78%)
No Faculty Advisor	1 (11%)
<b>Funding Support for Journal*</b>	
From Academic Institution or Department	4 (44%)
Student Organization	3 (33%)
Professional Organization	1 (11%)
Outside Organization	1 (11%)
Outside Donors	2 (22%)
Sales/Subscriptions	3 (33%)
Advertising	2 (22%)
No Funding	2 (22%)
Total Responses (N)	9
Identified Population	13
Response Rate	69%

Figures may not total 100% due to rounding.

\*Respondents could identify multiple sources of funding support

statistics in the research process, and senior thesis/applied research. Although all majors complete the three-course sequence, an optional fourth course, Advanced Research Practicum, was added for the second semester of the senior year. This course focuses on two primary objectives. First, students revise their senior thesis for presentation at on-campus and off-campus research conferences. As part of this process students create posters and practice presentation skills in class. In working with other students they engage in peer review, receiving and providing feedback prior to their research presentations. A second requirement of the class is to serve as a student editor for the *JPR*. Student editors solicit

articles, review them for clarity and content, and collaborate to decide on the papers that will appear in the online journal.

An important part of the journal process for students is the solicitation of papers for possible inclusion in the journal. Students who present papers at undergraduate and professional conferences are required to seek out papers for submission to the journal. The journal website also solicits submissions from undergraduate students and includes information on formatting and content requirements. Finally, Creighton's political science students are encouraged to submit their senior papers for consideration in the following year's journal.

Running a student journal presents a number of challenges. First, while the call for papers is open, most student submissions occur in the second semester of the senior year. As a result, the editors do not have a revise-and-resubmit option; papers are either accepted, with grammatical and other minor changes made by the editorial staff, or declined for publication. Submitting in the senior year makes following-up with authors a challenge. To address this, student contributors are encouraged to provide the name of a faculty sponsor and permanent e-mail address so editors can communicate about a manuscript.

A second challenge concerns the resources needed to publish the journal. An earlier student journal at Creighton was discontinued given the high cost of printing and the time commitments for student editors and faculty sponsors. The printing cost was addressed by publishing the *JPR* online with a link on the department of political science's web page. Making the editing process a requirement of a senior-level course reduced the cost for students because the time commitment for student editors is roughly equivalent to other upper-division classes. For faculty advisers, the workload is more than a typical upper-division course, but the time commitment varies based on number of submissions and the number of students in the class.

The *JPR* was intended as a means for undergraduate students to refine skills learned in the major through the editing and publication of a journal of undergraduate research. Course evaluations indicate that the result has been positive; students report enjoying using their undergraduate training in a way not typical in other classes. More telling perhaps is that graduating seniors strongly recommend the course to other undergraduates.

### *The Xavier Journal of Politics* (Xavier University, Cincinnati)

The *Xavier Journal of Politics* (*XJOP*) is an online undergraduate journal published annually by the department of political science at Xavier University. The journal was created to share outstanding political science papers by Xavier undergraduates. Although the department's senior seminar courses are the primary source for journal submissions, the journal welcomes papers from undergraduate students across the university without regard to major.

In the first two years of the journal's existence, three to four top third-year political science students were selected to serve as student editors by the journals' faculty adviser. In subsequent years, the editorial process was incorporated into an advanced political analysis course offered by the department and the third- and fourth-year students in the class served as journal editors.

The Call for Papers is advertised on campus early in the spring semester, and manuscripts are reviewed by the student editors after spring break. Papers that meet the initial approval of the student editors are reviewed by a member of the editorial team and a volunteer reviewer from the Xavier faculty. Reviews are then

shared with contributors, who have five to six weeks to respond to major concerns and return their manuscript for final editing. Because the final editing process occurs during the summer, the faculty adviser is generally responsible for final editing and formatting, leading to publication of the journal in the late summer or fall.

The journal is published online with PDF versions of articles posted on the journal website, which is located on the university's web page and hosted on the university's server. Formatting and publication come at zero additional cost to the university, making the *XJOP* a good example of a low-cost approach to journal publication.

The political science department believes that the *XJOP* has proven to be an effective complement to the department's undergraduate research program. Since the creation of the journal, the department has seen an increase in the number of students participating in undergraduate research conferences. In addition, the journal has been a valuable resource for the department's senior seminar course, providing students with models of how to structure and format their papers and giving them tangible evidence that conducting rigorous, high-quality research is "do-able."

decided, a Call for Papers is circulated among government students. Students are encouraged to select research from one of their government modules that can be developed and expanded into an article for publication. By encouraging students to use existing coursework, the journal is partly integrated into the curriculum.

The submission process has two stages. First, contributors submit a paper proposal or abstract, which is reviewed by the editorial board. The date of submission for the paper proposals is usually six weeks after the initial call for papers. Feedback is given on each proposal and advice provided on how the article could be developed. The feedback includes theoretical and empirical direction and information on useful sources. This work is carried out by the editorial board, and the student editors are responsible for all communication with contributors. The submission date for the first full draft of articles is the end of January.

Submissions undergo rigorous review by the editorial board. This process involves a mix of peer and faculty review. By early February, contributors are advised of the fate of their contributions and provided with detailed feedback about how to bring articles to publication format. Throughout the academic year, the *GPR* staff holds workshops focused on peer review and feedback,

*Course evaluations indicate that the result has been positive; students report enjoying using their undergraduate training in a way not typical in other classes. More telling perhaps is that graduating seniors strongly recommend the course to other undergraduates.*

Although the journal has been successful, its continued success depends heavily on the willingness of students and faculty to devote significant time and energy to the project. Before creating an undergraduate journal, departments should carefully consider whether they are willing and able to devote the resources necessary to maintain a journal over time.

#### **The Government and Politics Review (University College Cork, Ireland)**

*The Government and Politics Review (GPR)* is an online undergraduate journal of research in the department of government at University College Cork (UCC), Ireland. Initiated with start-up funding from National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL) by two department of government lecturers, the journal was launched in March 2010. Submissions are open to all students studying government in UCC (approximately 1,000 students). The journal has created a learning community for faculty, student editors, and student contributors from the department of government and promoted the integration of research, teaching, and learning.

The *GPR* is a collaborative effort that is edited and managed by students and faculty from the department of government and the undergraduate student society. Each September, an editorial board consisting of two staff and three students is established to coordinate the journal. The student members are selected by members of the student society. The first point of action is to decide a theme for the journal. Past themes have included political reform (2010), international relations (2011), and Europe and democracy in the 21st century (2012). Journal themes are kept broad to capture as many contributors as possible. After a theme has been

research skills, academic writing, and publication to equip students with the skills to complete the research and publication process.

From February to March, the focus is on bringing the journal articles to publication standard. Regular meetings between journal authors and the editorial board take place to review progress. This stage of the journal's development is also concerned with developing the online platform for the journal. Initially the journal title, logo, and website design were determined in a consultative process between staff and students. The journal is published online.

Each year, student editors and journal article contributors are asked to evaluate the journal through anonymous questionnaires. The feedback is universally positive. In 2010, every student ranked their experience as "excellent" and indicated that involvement in the journal made them more likely to participate in research and writing endeavors. In addition, 75% of students agreed that the journal "contributes greatly to better performance" in their politics modules, whereas 20% agreed that the project "contributed to better performance."

Staff feedback is also very positive, and there is clear agreement that the project has been successful for student editors. The main dilemma for the journal is low levels of student participation. Although each year more than 1,000 students are invited to contribute, no more than 15 students have accepted the invitation to participate each year. Increasing student participation remains a major goal for the future of the journal. One possible solution that continues to be debated is to fully integrate the journal into the curriculum by making the project a component of students' final-year research dissertations.

## CONCLUSION

Our review of 13 active undergraduate political science journals indicates that departments can take a variety of different approaches and organizational strategies if they are interested in launching a journal at their own institution. Before launching a journal, faculty need to think carefully about how the journal will be organized, whether it will be published online or in traditional print form, whether it will be integrated into existing coursework, how student editors will be selected, and what level of involvement faculty will have in the editing process. There is no one right way to organize an undergraduate journal, but faculty will find the process much easier if they think through these organizational issues ahead of time.

The case studies presented here suggest that undergraduate journals can promote student engagement, and the editing process can be a valuable learning experience for student editors and contributors. At the same time, departments should think carefully about whether sufficient resources are available to successfully manage and publish a journal. Before starting a journal, departments should remember that advising a journal is a hands-on activity that requires faculty to work closely with student editors at every stage in the process. Given the time commitment, junior faculty should be cautious before taking on the responsibility of advising an undergraduate journal.

Although undergraduate journals require considerable resources and time, the undergraduate journal experience is a great learning experience for student editors and student contributors. The editing process gives students the opportunity to closely read and evaluate their classmates' work and to engage in debates about whether a paper deserves publication. Student contributors are encouraged to see themselves as producers as well as consumers of knowledge. The act of writing for publication—as opposed to just writing for a grade—encourages students to do their very best work and take on projects that go above and beyond the typical undergraduate paper.

Technological changes make it much less complicated and costly to edit and publish an undergraduate journal. As more departments consider adding an undergraduate journal experience to their programs, more systematic research is needed to gauge the extent that undergraduate journals contribute to student learning and skill development. ■

## NOTES

1. See [http://www.apsanet.org/content\\_36367.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/content_36367.cfm) (viewed August 5, 2012).
2. See [http://www.cur.org/resources/students/undergraduate\\_journals/](http://www.cur.org/resources/students/undergraduate_journals/) (viewed August 5, 2012).

3. While the lists are by no means all-inclusive, they represent notable efforts by respected institutions in academia to catalog undergraduate research journals in political science (in the case of APSA) and generally (in the case of the CUR).
4. One journal was excluded from this analysis because its submission requirements were unclear.

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