

Editorial

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Abstract

This editorial piece marks the completion of my role as the Student Journal Editor for the Essex Student Journal. To commemorate this, I have written an account of my time in this editorial, exploring both the positives and challenges that have arisen.

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Article

Words have always been worlds to me. Whether in the form of books or journals, I have always been so grateful to others for sharing their worlds. Working as the Student Journal Editor has only impassioned my gratitude by allowing me to contribute to the publishing processes that make the sharing of worlds possible. This experience has been extremely valuable, as it has provided the space to not only familiarize myself with the publishing world and enhance my skillset in this area, but also to improve my academic knowledge - and this has been a huge bonus! I would, therefore, like to share this experience with you now and I hope that in reading about my strengths and challenges, I can inspire you to look more deeply into the world of publishing.

Starting a new job can be daunting, particularly when it is unfamiliar territory. Prior to working as the Student Journal Editor, I had little experience or knowledge of the publishing world. The demanding nature of an editor's job specification could easily have been overwhelming had it not been for the unwavering support of my colleague, Hannah. So, thank you, Hannah. The primary task I had to master was learning how to operate Janeway, which is an open-source scholarly

publishing platform. Using a test paper, Hannah guided me through the publishing process on the platform, starting at the submission of a paper, through to the review process, and all the way to publication. This meant getting acquainted with a whole series of procedures over and above simply reading the submission, a carefully designed set of steps to ensure the quality of each publication. Thanks to Hannah's key instructions, I learned to navigate this system of inflows and outputs and soon got the hang of facilitating a steady stream of journal articles.

Upon reflection, a positive lasting feeling of the experience is that the number of submissions the Essex Student Journal had was very proportionate to my role as the journal editor. The role was a fantastic stepping-stone into editorial work, without the pressures that a journal with a notable number of submissions would engender. The submissions that I did have the fortune of reading were all outstanding, and one submission, in particular, was a very joyous read. In her essay, "Damascus: Layers of Civilizations", Wafaa Alfares gives an account of the religious and architectural changes within Damascus, the capital city of Syria. The essay contrasts with the critical and analytical nature of the other submissions, and I was deeply fascinated with the mythical reading of Damascus that Wafaa presents. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to see Wafaa's essay published as it is still in the review stage; however, I am really looking forward to seeing it, as well as the other papers that are still in the review stage, published!

Having the opportunity to read so many fantastic submissions was unquestionably the highlight of my entire experience, particularly as it meant that I also had the chance to liaise with the authors and peer reviewers. This latter provided a human dimension to working as an editor, as I was able to work closely with the students and in so doing, this made the publishing process collaborative. One other notable positive part of my role was managing the social media presence for the journal. Not only was it wonderful to connect with fellow authors and peer reviewers via social media, but arguably more importantly, Hannah and I were avid users of GIFs! Vigorously searching for the perfect GIF is definitely something I will miss.

Whilst reading all the submissions was a delightful aspect of the role, there were also challenges that came with it. The Essex Student Journal is a multi-disciplinary journal; therefore, the most prominent challenge was getting to grips with the many unfamiliar subject areas. Personally,

reading anything economics-related is like learning a new language for me! These papers in particular required more time and attention to ensure that they were suitable for the journal. Assessing the suitability of a submission was a challenge in itself, as both objective and subjective evaluation that corresponded with the journal's submission guidelines was required. The type of questions that I would consider include: is the paper suited to the journal's style and content? Would the paper appeal to the broad readership of the journal? Does the submission sufficiently meet the criteria of the type of paper that it is (specifically, an essay, a case study, or a research paper)? These can be challenging questions to answer, as they require both objectivity and rigour, as well as subjective judgement calls. However, these questions became easier to assess as over time I formed internal guidelines that were based on increasing experience with the publishing process.

During the initial screening process, one of two possibilities occurred: the paper was either rejected straight away, or it was moved onto the peer-review stage. If the former occurred, a further challenge of communicating the reasons for this decision with the author arose; I had to ensure that it was done in a way that made it clear that the rejection was not an indication of the author's own abilities, but rather an indication of the style of the Essex Student Journal. A similar challenge arose if the paper went through to the review stage; I had to act as a mediator between the author and the reviewer to ensure that the feedback of the review was fair and considerate. On the odd occasion that I disagreed with certain parts of a review, or with the reviewer's recommendations, it would be due to a clash between the experiences of the reviewer, a PhD student, and the author, an undergraduate student. I felt that in these specific circumstances, the reviewer often held disproportionately high expectations of the content of the paper. When communicating with the reviewer the disagreements that I had, it was important to be mindful about my delivery, as I did not want to cause the reviewer any offence. Through conversations that followed with reviewers in these situations, the true collaborative nature of the publishing process became clear as we worked together to ensure the paper met the high standards of the journal, whilst still reflecting the author's writing style.

Whilst there have been evident challenges present throughout my role, I have also learnt a lot about the publishing process. One pivotal area of learning has been the benefits of the open access

movement. The Essex Student Journal is a diamond open access journal, which means that there are no fees or restrictions to accessing scholarly work. This is incredibly invaluable for students - including myself - as it provides a wide scope for research as well as providing equal access to research outputs. Helping the authors of the Essex Student Journal to publish their work open access also gives them more exposure, providing them a boost in their potential research careers.

Being the Student Journal Editor for the Essex Student Journal has sincerely been a highlight of my working experience. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to step into the world of publishing within such a supportive environment: not only within my own university, but also with the unwavering helping hands of my colleagues, especially Hannah. Being able to provide an authentic experience of the publishing process to students that harmonizes with the open access movement is a rewarding feeling as an editor and more importantly, as a fellow student. It is this intersection between excellence in research and education that reinforces the brilliant ethos of the Essex Student Journal: a journal run by students and for students.

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