

Editorial: My Time with the Journal

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Abstract

This editorial reflects on my year as the Editor of the Essex Student Journal (September 2024 – September 2025). It highlights the learning process of navigating academic publishing, the privilege of engaging with diverse student scholarship, and the collaborative relationships that made the role rewarding. Key experiences include supporting authors through revisions, coordinating peer review, working with volunteer copyeditors from the library, and helping to plan the Essex Student Journal Conference. Central throughout is the journal's spirit of being “by and for students,” which fosters confidence, inclusivity, and professional growth for authors, reviewers, and editors alike.

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Stepping into the Role

When I took on the role of Editor for the Essex Student Journal (ESJ) in September 2024, I carried both excitement and uncertainty. Excitement, because this was a unique opportunity to contribute to a student-led platform that has, for years, amplified the voices of Essex students. Uncertainty, because I knew that the role demanded not only editorial precision but also continuous learning, leadership, patience, and adaptability in equal measure.

From the very beginning, I benefited from the guidance and support of our amazing journal managers, Tom and Hannah. Their clear guidance and continuous support made the transition into the role much smoother, and I never felt alone when I had questions or faced challenges. I also had the chance to hear directly from the previous editor, Kimia Aghasoleimani, who generously shared her experiences and gave me a glimpse of what to expect. That early advice

stayed with me throughout the year, reminding me that I was stepping into a role that others had carried before me, and that I too was now part of the journal's ongoing story.

Looking back, the year has been transformative—not just for the journal's growth, but also for my own. What began as an administrative and editorial duty evolved into a journey of intellectual discovery, collaborative learning, and community-building.

The ESJ, with its “spirit” of “by and for students,” is unlike most academic journals. It does not exist to showcase the already-polished work of seasoned academics but rather to nurture, showcase, and celebrate the scholarly voices of students. My reflections are therefore not just about managing a publishing workflow, but about witnessing and facilitating growth, for authors, reviewers, and myself alike.

Learning the Editorial Craft

The first weeks were a crash course in the mechanics of academic publishing. Besides learning to manage the journal's systems, I learned the rhythm of submissions: receiving manuscripts, ensuring appropriateness, sending them out for review, and navigating the process of guiding authors through revisions. It required balancing firmness and encouragement, pushing for academic rigor without dampening the enthusiasm of early-career writers.

I quickly discovered that editing is not simply about correcting grammar, polishing sentences, or formatting the structure of papers submitted. It is about seeing the potential in a piece and helping it shine. Sometimes that meant suggesting structural changes, other times it meant providing reassurance to a nervous author doubting their capability or waiting anxiously for feedback. Each email I sent, each margin comment I left, became part of a wider dialogue about what it means to write, to publish, and to contribute to knowledge.

The double-blind peer review system was another layer of learning. It was a privilege to manage this process, pairing reviewers with manuscripts, ensuring feedback was both constructive and respectful, and mediating between differing opinions. Training workshops we hosted for peer reviewers highlighted just how formative this process can be for postgraduate students who may later serve as reviewers for professional journals. By demystifying peer review, the journal cultivates not only authors but also the next generation of stewards of academic quality.

A Window into Multiple Worlds

One of the joys of the ESJ is its multidisciplinary nature. Over the year, I have read submissions ranging from analyses of political institutions to explorations of literary themes; from empirical studies in psychology, to reflections on legal frameworks. Each manuscript opened a window into a discipline different from my own, allowing me to travel, in a sense, through the diverse intellectual landscapes of our student body.

What struck me most was the courage of these authors. Some submitted work that had been born in the classroom, initially written as essays or dissertations, and then reworked with the encouragement of lecturers or peers. Turning coursework into publishable scholarship is no small feat, and to watch that process unfold, draft by draft and edit by edit, was inspiring.

I also learned to appreciate the value of writing for a “non-specialist readership,” one of the journal’s guiding principles. This demanded a particular clarity and accessibility from our authors. It challenged me, as an editor, to push for prose that retained complexity of thought while remaining inviting to a reader who may not be an expert in the subject. That balancing act (between depth and accessibility) is a lesson I will carry forward in all my own academic writing.

Building Relationships and Community

The role of Editor is never solitary. At every step, I was part of a web of relationships: with authors, peer reviewers, the management team, the advisory board, the library staff, and the wider Essex community.

Working with authors was perhaps the most rewarding dimension. I came to see myself less as a gatekeeper and more as a mentor, helping authors understand reviewer feedback, reframe arguments, or simply find the confidence to submit or present their work, or persevere through multiple revisions. The gratitude expressed by authors after publication, whether in a short thank-you email or in seeing their work showcased online, made the editorial work worthwhile.

Engagement with peer reviewers was equally fulfilling. Some came into the process tentatively, unsure of their ability to constructively critique another student’s work. Others embraced it as an opportunity to refine their own critical reading skills. Our peer reviewer training workshop, conducted by Hannah (the journal manager), crystallised this, bringing together reviewers from across disciplines to reflect not just on how to judge quality, but how to foster growth by providing constructive feedback.

Another important but often unseen web was working with our volunteer copyeditors, who were members of the library staff. Their careful attention to detail, professionalism, and commitment to supporting student authors made an enormous difference to the quality of our published work. They not only helped polish manuscripts to meet the journal’s standards but also modelled the patience and generosity that lie at the heart of academic publishing. Collaborating with them reminded me that the ESJ is not sustained by students alone, but by a wider community of staff who believe in the importance of giving student voices a platform.

The Advisory Board meetings were another highlight of the year. These gatherings reminded me that the journal’s future is never static. Listening to past editors reflect on their experiences, while also brainstorming with colleagues about new initiatives, gave me a real sense of continuity. Each

editor adds a new layer to the journal's history, and it was inspiring to be part of that ongoing evolution.

The ESJ Conference (April 2025) was equally memorable, even though I was away on research leave when it took place. I was closely involved in the planning, and I knew how much work went into making it a success. The conference truly captured the spirit of the journal: providing a space where authors could share their work with pride. Even from a distance, I felt connected to the energy of the event, and it was rewarding to know that it gave our contributors a platform that extended beyond the page.

The Spirit of the Journal

What sets the ESJ apart is not just its open-access model, or its multi-disciplinary scope, but its spirit. It is, at its heart, a developmental journal of encouragement for authors, reviewers, and editors. It tells authors: *your work matters*. It tells reviewers: *your judgment is valued*. It tells editors: *you are part of a legacy*.

In a world where academic publishing can often feel intimidating and exclusionary, the ESJ offers a gentler introduction, without sacrificing standards. It provides a space where students can make their first mark on the scholarly record, and where mistakes are seen not as failures but as steps in the learning process.

I found that this spirit shaped my own growth. As an early-career researcher, I often face the same insecurities as our authors: is my writing good enough? Will my arguments hold up? Through my time with the journal, I have learned that publishing is not about perfection, but about dialogue. It is about offering something to the world, however small, and being open to refinement.

Concluding Reflections

When I first sat down to draft this editorial, I worried that I might not have enough to say. After all, what could one year capture? But in writing these reflections, I realise just how much the ESJ has given me: insights into publishing, exposure to new ideas, relationships with colleagues, and above all, a deeper belief in the value of student scholarship. The role has demanded resilience, attention to detail, and a willingness to juggle many responsibilities. But it has also given me immense satisfaction, a sense of being part of something that matters. The ESJ is not just about publishing papers—it is about cultivating voices. And those voices, in their diversity and originality, are what make our university community so vibrant.

For me, it has been an honour to serve.

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