

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR: CONCERNS AND INNOVATIONS

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Greetings from the *Journal of Politics* Editorial Office! For the past two years, I have maintained a low profile within the *Journal*. After all, page space is a scarce commodity, and most people are more interested in what the authors have to say than they are in an Editor's remarks. But, at this point—about halfway through my editorial term—there is some information that I would like to share with *JOP* readers. It involves matters of concern to authors, as well as some changes that I am making to the *Journal's* content and operating procedures.

AUTHORS' CONCERNS

My overriding objective as Editor is to see that the *Journal of Politics* publishes pathbreaking, theory-relevant work of the highest quality, from all subfields and perspectives within our discipline. While I believe that most authors agree with this goal, I also know that they have some other pressing concerns, as well. Prominent among these are turnaround times for submissions and the long time lag that often occurs between an article's acceptance and its actual appearance in print. I am happy to say that we are making real progress on both of these fronts.

Much Shorter Turnaround Times

In the *JOP* office, we are especially proud of our successful effort to reduce the turnaround time required for manuscript processing. We define "turnaround time" as the number of workdays from the time we receive a submitted paper to the time I make the publication decision for that paper. Of course, authors (and Editors) would like the fastest possible turnaround. Traditionally, however, the process has been frustratingly slow. Average turnaround times usually hovered around three months and it could take much longer than that on any given manuscript.

Recently, the situation has begun to improve. Technological and procedural innovations such as electronic manuscripts, e-mailed reviews, and a regular reminder system for referees have produced immediate results. Of course, I also want to thank my colleagues throughout the discipline, who have generally been very conscientious about returning their reviews in a timely manner.

Complete information can be found on the *JOP* web site (www.cla.sc.edu/jop/). But, the summary statistics are very impressive: For the period from January 1, 2002 through November 1, 2002, the median turnaround time was 37 workdays (or 54 days, if weekends and holidays are included). I believe that this represents an excellent record, not only in absolute terms but also in comparison to the turnaround times reported by other major political science journals. Of course, I cannot promise that *all* manuscripts will be turned around quite that quickly. But, I am confident that authors who submit their work to the *Journal of Politics* will hear from me very promptly about the results of the review process.

Dealing with the Acceptance-Publication Time Lag

The lag time from a paper's acceptance to its publication is probably a somewhat less serious problem than the turnaround times. Surprisingly, though, it has proven to be a more recalcitrant one. When I took over as *JOP* Editor (on January 1, 2001), I inherited a full year's worth of accepted work—nearly fifty articles and research notes. Since that time, I have not made much progress in reducing the size of the backlog. Unfortunately, a permanent solution to this problem remains elusive. Still, I am discussing several possible strategies with Blackwell Publishers.

At the same time, I do have a plan that should provide some partial relief in the immediate future. Starting with our next issue (Volume 65, Number 3, August 2003), the articles scheduled to appear in an issue will be made available as PDF files on the *Journal of Politics* web site (again, www.cla.sc.edu/jop/). Note that these will always be the final versions of the manuscripts and *not* preliminary drafts. The content will be identical to that which appears in print. The articles will be placed on the site as soon as I put each issue together. And, they will remain there—available to all interested parties—until the printed issue is published. At that time, the PDF files will be removed from the web site.

I realize that this is a rather small step. But, it will make the *JOP*'s content available to readers at least six months earlier than would otherwise be the case. From a broad perspective, this will contribute directly to more rapid dissemination of information within the discipline. Viewed a bit more narrowly, it will enable *JOP* authors to remove more quickly the “forthcoming” notation from their vitae—something that can be very important in tenure/promotion cases, performance evaluation reviews, and the like. I am very grateful to Blackwell Publishers for their permission to make the *Journal of Politics*' content available on the Worldwide Web in this manner.

SOME INNOVATIONS IN *JOP* PROCEDURES

Within our discipline, the editorships of the major journals are temporary positions with set terms of office. This means that there will be a fairly steep learning curve for new editors. Like most others who find themselves in such a position, I began by relying on the established procedures I inherited from the previous *JOP* Editor (David Lowery) who, in turn, got them from his predecessors, and so on. After two years in office, I believe that I am familiar enough with the responsibilities of this position to begin putting my own stamp on the *JOP*'s operations.

Eliminating the Submission Fee

First, I am eliminating the \$10 submission fee, effective on January 1, 2003. I realize that this date will be quite awhile in the past by the time most of you read this. But, while I am writing these words, it is about six weeks in the future.

The submission fee did serve an important purpose: The resultant funds provided direct support for the *JOP* office. We used it for postage, stationery, office supplies, and equipment maintenance. Of course, the *Journal* could not function without these resources. Therefore, I am

very happy that the Southern Political Science Association supported my proposal to eliminate the fee and cover it with additional financial support.

I suspect that the \$10 fee seldom, if ever, prevented anyone from submitting their work to the *Journal of Politics*. However, it would be impossible to deny that the fee was an inconvenience to authors and *JOP* office personnel, alike. At the same time, I am sure that decisions based upon rational considerations led at least some political scientists to try other high-quality publication outlets before sending their work to us. I sincerely hope that will not be the case in the future.

Eliminating the submission fee also has another beneficial consequence: We can now accept fully-electronic manuscript submissions. In other words, authors can simply e-mail PDF files to the *JOP* office, without sending any hard copies at all. This will not only conserve resources (i.e., paper, postage, etc.); it should also facilitate even faster turnaround times in the review process.

Eliminating the “Research Notes” Section

The second innovation I would like to report involves the organization of the material that is published in the *Journal of Politics*. A glance at The Table of Contents in this issue will reveal that I am no longer making a distinction between “Articles” and “Research Notes.” When I started out as Editor, I had intended to provide a clear definition for the kind of paper that would constitute a research note, along with the features that differentiate it from a “full-fledged” article. In practice, however, that has been impossible. Instead, research notes have simply been short articles. And, if that is the case, I see absolutely no compelling reason to place them within a separate category.

Please understand that I will definitely continue publishing the types of articles that previously appeared within the “Research Notes” section of the *Journal*. There are a number of advantages to be gained by doing so. Most important, short papers that address central points in ongoing lines of scholarly work contribute directly to the development of broad substantive theories. And that, of course, is what the *JOP* is all about. At the same time, relatively concise articles are often more comprehensible than lengthier tomes. This is not only an end in itself: According to the feedback I receive, such articles are very popular with *JOP* readers. And, of course, there are practical considerations. If authors submit shorter papers, I can (assuming they are of high enough quality) publish more of them within the limited *JOP* page space. So, the bottom line on this point is that the kind of work we have come to recognize as research notes will continue to appear in the *Journal of Politics*. They will just not be identified (or stigmatized?) as such.

Moving the JOP Editorial Office to Michigan State University

The third innovation may be largely transparent to many *Journal of Politics* readers, although it will definitely be apparent to submitting authors and to the *JOP* staff. The *Journal of Politics* offices will be moving to Michigan State University, where I have accepted a faculty position in the Department of Political Science. The transfer will occur during Summer 2003, with exact

details laid out on the *JOP* web site (again, www.cla.sc.edu/jop/) and in subsequent issues of the *Journal*.

Some people may be surprised that a publication sponsored by the Southern Political Science Association will be located so far above the Mason-Dixon line. In fact, I hope this move will emphasize that the *JOP* is definitely *not* the “journal of southern political science.” Instead, the geographical dispersal of the authors who send in their work, the subject matter of the published articles, and the political scientists that read our material all serve to demonstrate that the *JOP* has a constituency that is truly broad and fully international in character.

My thanks go to the University of South Carolina Department of Government and International Studies for its support over the past two years. But, I simply could not imagine a better home for the *JOP* than the Political Science Department at Michigan State. They certainly have a great deal of experience with high-impact publication outlets within our discipline: Once we move there, MSU will be the only school to have hosted the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *American Political Science Review*, and the *Journal of Politics*— a veritable hat trick of journals! Seriously, though, Michigan State offers a very generous package of resources as well as a congenial setting. I know the *JOP*— and, in turn, the discipline— will benefit as a result.

CONCLUSION: WE’D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

In conclusion, I hope you find the *Journal of Politics*’ content to be insightful, thought-provoking, and relevant to your own work. The various changes I have outlined in these remarks should maximize the efficiency of the operating procedures within the *JOP* Editorial Offices and make them a bit more convenient for authors, without sacrificing any quality in the *Journal*’s content. For more information, please check out our web site (one more time: www.cla.sc.edu/jop/). Finally, please let us know if you have any thoughts or reactions to these plans for the *JOP*. Our mailing address and telephone numbers are listed in the front matter of this issue. And, our e-mail addresses are jop@sc.edu or jopeditor@sc.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!