Editorial

The Academic Journal Editor—Secrets Revealed*

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Introduction

Academic publishing is a world filled with more mystery than revelation. Often the best advice is made available only to those lucky enough to hear it by word of mouth. This is no less true with editing academic journals. I have enjoyed the honour of launching the *Journal of Moral Philosophy* and serving as its editor for the last ten years. I actively sought out the best advice on a number of issues from editors serving on leading journals as well as their publishers. Despite the fact that most of the conversations focused on journals in the areas of law, philosophy, and political science, I believe that much of the general advice remains true for most disciplines.

This editorial brings together some lessons learned over the years and reveals some secrets about the trade. My purpose is to improve the information available to share best practice and offer some insight into the minds of academic journal editors. This is a task I have performed

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previously on the topics of publishing advice and referee guidelines that I extend now to journal editing (see Brooks 2008, Brooks 2010). I begin with a brief note about my background experiences before moving to advice on how to successfully propose a new journal to a publisher. I then discuss topics such as managing a journal launch before considering advice on the effective management of submissions received and further advice on journal development.

Background

The first secret: I benefited from a lucky break early in my academic career. I had moved to University College Dublin to pursue a MA in Philosophy after completing a MA in Political Science at Arizona State University. I considered taking a year off studies before applying to Ph.D. programmes for two reasons. First, I was unsure whether or not to return to the United States. Secondly, if I did stay overseas, then I wanted to prepare myself for applications in the UK and Ireland—a world that I was relatively unfamiliar with. My lucky break came in serving as a lowly ‘Executive Assistant’ in the Department of Philosophy at University College Dublin. The department’s head was Dermot Moran and he was also then editor of the International Journal of Philosophical Studies. One part of my duties was to serve as the IJPS managing editor.

This was a lucky break. First, I had an invaluable learning experience in discovering the ways in which different authors composed and submitted their work. It took little time to discover that often papers appearing sloppily produced rarely succeeded in earning positive reviews. So one lesson was to ensure that my submitted work looked the part: one potential ‘nudge’ to referees was to make my work look like a published article. Inevitably, there were papers received that had the odd coffee stain (a surprisingly common occurrence) and once or twice I recall a smudge suggesting spaghetti sauce. How times have changed since the launch of electronic submission platforms. More importantly, I paid careful attention to the difference in argumentative strategies adopted by successful and unsuccessful submissions. The most successful submissions were often the best in appearance, clearly structured, focused on one or two central points, and the paper would be strictly limited to its topic. The less successful were often poorly presented where its central contribution was left unclear or unspecified and these papers might include many points, footnotes, and sometimes whole sections that were unnecessary or even off-topic. There is