

**ESTABLISHING AND PUBLISHING  
AN ONLINE PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL:  
ACTION PLAN, RESOURCING, AND COSTS**

Dr. Lorna Shapiro, 2005

Introduction by Kevin Stranack, PKP Systems Team, November, 2006.

Open Journal Systems is a research and development initiative of the Public Knowledge Project at the University of British Columbia. Its continuing development is currently overseen by a partnership among UBC's Public Knowledge Project, the Canadian Center for Studies in Publishing, and the Simon Fraser University Library.

For more information, see the Public Knowledge Project web site:

<http://pkp.sfu.ca>

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## **Introduction**

This report is the result of a 2005 investigation by educational leadership consultant Dr. Lorna Shapiro into the feasibility of utilizing the Open Journal Systems (OJS), a product of the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University's Public Knowledge Project, for the establishment of a new online, peer-reviewed journal. The intent of distributing this document is to share the findings of an independent analyst, whose work we believe not only highlights the strengths of OJS, but also answers many questions others will have in the early stages of starting a journal, including the critical issues of time, costs, and planning.

OJS was found to be an excellent match for the requirements of the intended journal. The following sections provide the information required to assess the feasibility of establishing the journal:

- background and current status of the OJS product,
- a recommended approach to technical administration of the journal, and
- a description of the tasks, timeframes and costs for which the faculty and administrative team would be responsible in the set-up and operations of the journal.

Some additional context is required while reading this report. The recommendation to use the Simon Fraser University Library's hosting and support services is a reflection of the local context and time when this report was prepared. Editors and publishers wanting to use OJS should be aware there are many other local hosting or ISP options whenever they see a reference to SFU Library hosting. Also, all costs in the report are in Canadian dollars.

## **The OJS Product**

The Open Journal System is a software application that was developed and enhanced over a period of years under the guidance of Dr. John Willinsky of UBC's Faculty of Education as part of the Public Knowledge Project. The philosophical impetus for this initiative was Dr. Willinsky's strong belief that knowledge from academia ought to be widely and freely accessible to all who may be interested. A particular concern of his was the sharing of knowledge with citizens of under-developed nations who he felt could benefit enormously from access to research but for whom financial constraints made both established print publications and conferences inaccessible. Dr. Willinsky sought to develop a software package that met the following criteria:

- supported all aspects of web-based on-line publishing of peer-reviewed journals

- was “open source”, meaning that the software would be free to any who wished to use it, and would adhere to established open source conventions, thereby allowing it to be enhanced by disparate groups who could develop and make available new features
- was intuitive to use for individuals accustomed to browsers and standard office software
- supported a variety of approaches to article submission, peer review, and the distribution of editorial and administrative responsibility.

OJS has been widely adopted, with (as of November 2006) approximately 875 journals making use of this software, and with an average of forty new journals using OJS each month.

As the base of usage grew, the product moved from “pilot project” status, through “beta test” status, and with the release of Version 2 has reached a “production” version. At the same time, the operating environment for the application moved from research status to production quality operations when Dr. Willinsky entered a three-way partnership to provide ongoing support for the system:

Partner	Responsibility
SFU Library	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ongoing development of the software</li> <li>2. Hosting equipment and technical support services for the use of OJS as an online publishing tool</li> </ol>
SFU Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Design and layout services for journal publishers who wish to tailor the “look and feel” of their journal rather than adopt the standard OJS templates</li> </ol>
Dr. John Willinsky	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ongoing research related to creating public access to academic research.</li> </ol>

Effective June 2005, the SFU Library entered the business of providing hosting services for OJS and assumed responsibility for the ongoing maintenance and development of the system. The Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing has been using OJS for several years and is a strong addition to the partnership supporting the ongoing evolution of OJS.

## **Hosting and Technical Support of the Journal**

This report recommends the use of OJS, hosted by the SFU Library, as the publishing platform for a new journal for the following reasons:

1. OJS is now a well-developed full functioned system for supporting on-line publishing.
2. SFU is one of five universities across Canada participating in the “Synergies” project<sup>1</sup>, which is establishing a virtual national database of articles published in on-line journals hosted by these universities. The benefit to Canadian journals is that all articles published will be referenced in that national database, resulting in a higher placement of the article (and the journal) in search engine (e.g. Google Scholar) results. This maximizes the likelihood of an article in the journal, relevant to a search by some individual, appearing on page 1 or 2 of the search results.
3. SFU Library has the technical support resources, both software development and systems operations, necessary to ensure a reliable and secure hosting service.
4. Offsite back-up procedures, needed to ensure re-start is possible in the event of catastrophic systems failure are already in operation for the SFU Library systems.
5. The reliability of the OJS product is apparent given its long-term use by the SFU Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing.
6. Dr. Willinsky is an internationally recognized leader in this area and adoption of OJS is only likely to increase with the new “production operations” hosting services offered by the SFU Library.

The cost of the hosting service provided by the SFU Library has been set at a very affordable rate for each journal hosted<sup>2</sup>. This allows journals to avoid the full costs of server data storage, operations staff, offsite back-up, and new version implementation.

## **The Publishing Process**

The following are the steps through which a submitted article moves from initial submission to publishing in the journal. Note that the responsibilities for the roles described here are provided in the following section.

1. The article is submitted in Word format by the author who is accessing the journal through a web browser.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.synergies.umontreal.ca>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on SFU Library’s hosting and support services, visit the web site at: <http://software.lib.sfu.ca/support.html>

2. On a weekly basis the Managing Editor (an administrative role) accesses the journal through the web and retrieves all articles that have been submitted and not yet reviewed. Weekly is recommended because it is frequent enough to give reasonable response time to authors, and not so frequent as to be inefficient in the use of administrative resources.
3. The Managing Editor sits down with the Editor (an academic role), who determines who will review the article. The Managing Editor then removes the author's name from the document (to allow for blind review) and sends the article to the reviewer via the journal system. The Managing Editor will track the articles through the process of review, sending reminders if necessary. The review is placed into the journal system by the reviewer.
4. The Editor considers the review and makes a decision whether or not to publish the article. If the decision is not to publish it, then the author is informed and provided access to the review. If the decision is to publish, then the Editor so informs the author, provides the review, and asks the author to revise the article.
5. The Managing Editor passes the revised article through the Editor to ensure that the revisions are as requested.
6. The article is then passed through three functions: copy editing (grammar, references), proofing (typographical errors, spelling errors), and layout (creating both an HTML and a PDF version of the article and loading these into the journal system when it is time to publish the article.)

## **Resources and Costs**

The following table summarizes the roles associated with the publishing of the journal, the skill sets required for each role, and the estimated time (or cost where contractors are recommended) that will be required to perform the role.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Skill Set</b>	<b>Time/Cost<sup>3</sup></b>
Managing Editor (& backup)	Administration of all articles through the review process to publishing, ensuring timely processing of the articles. Maintains financial records relevant to the journal.	Process administration, communication, understanding of the publishing process, competent with software applications.	Estimated to be 1 day per week for a journal that is published 2 to 4 times per year.
Editor (& backup)	Ensure academic quality of the journal. Leads the editorial board. Solicits articles. Solicits reviewers. Establishes contracts for the professional functions of copy editing, proofing and layout.	Strong academic qualifications, administrative & financial management, wide base of academic & professional contacts, competent with software applications.	Recommended that release time equivalent to one course be provided to the faculty member for this role.
Editorial Board	Academic direction of the journal in consultation with the Editor. Commitment to review 3-5 articles per year.	The board should have strong and diverse academic & professional experience. Should be expanded to be multi-institution when possible.	These individuals typically perform the function as part of their overall professional duties and the time demands are not onerous.

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<sup>3</sup> All costs are in Canadian dollars.



<b>Role</b>	<b>Responsibilities</b>	<b>Skill Set</b>	<b>Time/Cost<sup>3</sup></b>
Copy Editor	Responsible for grammar and appropriate academic standards for the structure and format of the article.	Recommended that this be a professional copy editor, familiar with academic formatting standards.	Typically these are graduate students in publishing, currently paid \$30/hour or \$300 - \$400 per article.
Proofer	Responsible for ensuring that there are no typographical errors in the article.	Again this is a profession in itself.	Proofers are typically paid about \$500 per issue of a journal.
Layout Specialist	Responsible for setting up the article in both HTML and PDF formats, laying out the pages in a professional manner.	This is a professional specialty. For academic journals the recommended page layout program is Framemaker.	Costs for layout work typically run about \$800 per issue.

The costs implied by this resourcing model, assuming two issues annually and 8-10 articles per issue, are as follows:

<b>Item</b>	<b>Unit Cost</b>	<b>Units per Year</b>	<b>Annual Cost</b>
Editor release time	One course release per term	2	2 courses of workload
Administrative assistant time	One day per week		20% of annual cost for an administrative assistant
Copy Editing	\$400 per article	20	\$8,000

Layout	\$100 per article	20	\$2,000
Proofing	\$40 per article	20	\$800
Hosting service	\$750 per year	1	\$750

## Administrative Design Decisions

Aside from the academic decisions regarding the mandate of the journal and standards to be applied in evaluating articles, there are some administrative design decisions that are required.

Specifically, they are:

### 1. Publishing unit

There are three approaches used in online publishing: article at a time, article at a time building up to an issue, or issue at a time. With print publishing the unit was an issue. This restriction need not exist with an online journal. The experienced OJS publishers consulted recommend publishing articles at the time they are received building up to an issue which is closed off and another issue started at some point. Two arguments support this approach over simply article at a time publishing: referencing of articles in the journal is more easily accomplished if the concept of an issue is maintained, and this allows thematic approaches to issues (which can improve readership.)

### 2. Subscription philosophy

Online journals generally take one of three approaches to subscriptions: no subscriptions (free access), access only to paid subscribers, or free access to back issues but only paid subscribers can access the current issue. Free access seems to be appropriate for the following reasons: there is no need to publish in paper form, free access broadens readership, and the costs of managing the subscriber list and fee collection exceeds the revenue generated.

### 3. Advertising

Whether or not to pursue revenue for the journal through the selling of advertising space is the third administrative decision that should be considered at the time of setting up the journal. Textbook publishers are often eager to promote their business through advertising in web applications that attract academics. This means of revenue generation

is considerably easier to administer than subscription fees, and can help offset operating costs associated with the journal. Once the readership “hit rate” is up to a reasonable level, many publishers of online journals do pursue advertising contracts.

## **Tasks and Timeframes – Journal Set-up**

The following task timeline provides a guideline for the launch preparations of a new journal.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Decision to proceed with journal, including budget and resource approvals.	Week 1
Determine who will fill the roles of editor (& backup), managing editor/assistant to the editor (& backup), editorial board.	Week 1
Agree on statement of purpose for the journal, and theme for first issue if desired.	Week 1
Establish agreement with SFU for hosting service.	Week 2 - 3
Conduct training for editor and managing editor and their backups.	Week 2 - 3
Review “Design Options” and agree on approach to be adopted for the journal for each of these options.	Week 3
Identify possible contributors to 1 <sup>st</sup> issue of the journal and contact them to encourage contributions.	Week 3
Identify contractors to perform copy editor, proofer and layout functions.	Week 4

<b>Task</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>
Complete initial set-up of the journal web-site with no articles.	Week 4
Conduct training for editorial board (regarding their roles as reviewers), and, if necessary, the contractors who will be used for copy editing, proofing and layout functions.	Week 5
Pilot process with dummy articles.	Week 6 - 7
Send out broadly to the education community an announcement of the journal, theme of 1 <sup>st</sup> issue if appropriate, request for contributions, link to journal.	Week 8
Editorial board to make decision regarding possible collaboration opportunities identified in this report.	Week 9

## **Conclusion**

This investigation has revealed that online publishing has moved from the experimentation and development stages and is now a proven technology. Dr. John Willinsky's Open Journal System has proven to be a fully-functioned online journal system. Simon Fraser University's experience with hosting online journals, their participation in a national consortium of universities publishing online, and their experience with online publishing through the Centre for Studies in Publishing provides both a hosting service and a base of expertise that is readily accessible to a new journal. This greatly reduces the uncertainties associated with commencing online publishing.

Hard costs associated with the operation of an online journal are in the vicinity of \$11,000 to \$14,000 per year. Soft costs include 20% of the annual salary of an administrative assistant and 2 course release credits for the Editor. Offsetting revenue opportunities exist if advertising space is sold in the journal.

The combination of established technology, established service providers, and modest operating costs argue in favour of pursuing the publication of an online peer-reviewed journal. However, there remain critical success factors that are intangible but which should be considered

prior to committing to the publication of the journal. Faculty experienced with the publication of online journals by a departmental team identify the following as necessary to ensure success of such an initiative: departmental support as demonstrated by the willingness to devote the required resources, a core of faculty believing that they are doing an important thing in publishing the journal, and the scholarly & professional stature of the faculty and their consequent ability to attract credible authors. Believing that those conditions exist, it appears that all that stands between now and the achievement of the reputable online journal is energy and some hard work!

## Appendix 1: Contacts

Name	Role	Contact Information
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