

Step Up for *SPUR*

Abstract

This editorial details observations from a departing associate editor of *SPUR* about the experience of working on the journal. The author contextualizes this work within the academic journal editorial process, focusing on specific challenges recruiting reviewers for the peer review process. The author stresses the importance of broad participation from the undergraduate research community, including submitting articles to *SPUR*, accepting requests to review manuscripts, and participating in the editorial board, all to ensure the sustainability and intellectual vitality of the journal.

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This editorial marks the end of my term as an associate editor for *SPUR* after eight years of engagement with the journal in various roles. It has been a fascinating ride, being part of the transition from *CUR Quarterly* to *SPUR*, integrating the journal into the current landscape of scholarly publications, replete with DOIs, journal impact factors, and the tensions between subscription and open access models. But as I step down, I want to encourage all of you to step up for *SPUR*, as readers, authors, reviewers, and also as editors. We are a diverse scholarly collective of teachers, researchers, students, writers, thinkers, creators, administrators—often many of these all at once—with a shared interest: undergraduate research. What does that look like in your discipline, or mine? How do students at different kinds of institutions benefit from engagement in UR? How do we assess the impact of UR on student learning or persistence? What innovations are happening? What can the scientist learn from the artist, the humanist from the social scientist? The dialogical space in *SPUR* is as wide as our community is broad. Those adjectives are intentional, as it is only with broad participation from our *SPUR* community that this journal will continue to grow in its impact and importance. It is only with the same broad participation that we will continue to learn more from our collective work about how and why this high-impact practice works effectively in different educational contexts.

There are many ways you can get involved in this process, all of which are familiar to you as academics. But it is

worth taking a few minutes to remind you why these roles are so important. As *SPUR* authors, your innovations, projects, and studies form this journal's content. In publishing your work, your ideas and discoveries become part of the scholarly conversation and have the power to influence new directions in the undergraduate research community. In accepting a request to review a manuscript, you not only have the opportunity to share your expertise with a prospective author, but you also help improve the rigor and quality of a colleague's scholarship and of *SPUR*'s publications. As a member of *SPUR*'s editorial group, you have an opportunity to shape journal issues, refine processes, and continue the work of transitioning the journal to an electronic publication format. And although all of these are volunteer roles that require giving of your time and expertise, let me also stress the personal and professional gains not just in publishing an article, but also in your own learning and development within a rich professional community.

Here I would like to focus more on the peer review process: that unheralded, invisible role that is essential to strengthening the quality of work by individual scholars and the research impact of *SPUR*. Reviewers are vital to helping the editorial group maintain the intellectual integrity of *SPUR*. Although scholarly peer review can be traced back to the eighteenth century, it is only in the second half of the twentieth century that the process has taken on the shape we understand today, with multiple experts in the field providing their critique and feedback as part of the scholarly publication process. In a 2019 survey by Elsevier and Sense about Science, 90 percent of researchers agreed that peer review improves the quality of research publications; however, they are less satisfied with the length of time involved in the peer review process. As an associate editor, I experience that frustration along with the authors who have submitted manuscripts for review. I also empathize with those asked to generously share their time and expertise as a peer reviewer. But the reality is there are simply too few people willing to participate in the peer review process. A 2018 Publons report on the global state of peer review pointed to a rise in "reviewer fatigue." Based on their data, they predict that by 2025 editors will need to invite 3.6 reviewers for every completed review. I see this trend play out in every manuscript I manage.

It is understandable, of course. We are now more busy than ever, juggling increased administrative responsibilities, the need to focus on work that supports our own professional advancement, adapting to shifting institutional priorities,

the COVID-19 impacts on our students, new technologies like Chat-GPT, and the ever-present attention to the bottom line. It becomes more complicated in an academic landscape in which more than 70 percent of our teaching faculty are adjunct, without the protections and rewards of a tenure-track system. Despite that difficult reality, I still appeal to you to step up. For the peer review system to continue to work effectively, we need to increase the number and diversity of our peer reviewers. Relying on a small number of individuals as reviewers reduces the scholarly conversation to an echo chamber. Expanding that network is essential to ensure a robust, rigorous journal. If you are publishing in academic journals, consider it part of your responsibility to support the work of reviewing manuscripts. If we truly value peer review—and arguably we still do—we all need to contribute.

Within the editorial group, under Pam Mabrouk's thoughtful leadership as editor in chief, we continue to identify ways to improve the process for potential authors and reviewers. We have revised guidelines for manuscript submissions and writing reviews. In our outreach, we try to reduce barriers to participation as well. We can not provide reviewers with more time in your day or incentives beyond the importance of engagement for the sustenance of our

scholarly community, the learning you will gain in the review process, and the impact of your generous contribution to other scholars in helping them sharpen their work.

In my work with *SPUR* over the years, I have learned much about our community's engagement with undergraduate research, ranging from disciplinary to institutional innovations and always pushing forward the work of assessment. As someone trained in the humanities, who is most comfortable in libraries and archives, I have benefited greatly from the challenges posed by thinking outside of my own methodological comfort zone and the opportunity to engage in conversations about the evolution of *SPUR*. I invite all of you to consider ways, large or small, you might engage in the scholarly work of *SPUR*, and to email us at SPUR@CUR.org if you are interested in serving as a reviewer.

I also want to thank all of you—readers, authors, and especially our unrecognized reviewers—for your commitment to the work of undergraduate research and continuing to explore disciplinary, programmatic, and institutional innovations and emphasize the work of assessment. Our scholarly community, and our students, are all the better for your engagement.