To Peer Review or Not To Peer Review:

An Editor's Dilemma

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Along with its new open access platform, there is another innovative change happening with LL&M, a change in what is published that is best described as a hybrid content model. While some readers may have a clear picture of librarianship publications, others may not have considered the different models that editors and publishers use for serials. In the past, there have tended to be two types of professional journals in librarianship. The first is the trade publication model with feature pieces solicited and reviewed exclusively by an editor. These serials are often viewed more as "magazines" and generally do not include research-oriented manuscripts. The content focuses on interviews, member news, experience-based articles written in first person, and state-of-the-profession features. Articles may be shorter and explore issues at the surface rather than studying issues with significant depth or breadth. They can also be applied, best practices style articles with tips for innovative solutions to everyday problems encountered by many libraries. The second type of professional serial publication is the scholarly journal model with longer research-focused articles. These journals tend to have a tighter topical focus and content is more formal in presentation, including manuscripts written in 3rd person with an abstract or theoretical focus based on traditional data collection and formal analysis methodologies. Usually, the articles have gone through an extensive, often lengthy pre-publication process of expert review prior to publication, which can negatively impact the timeliness of the information. Both models may have resource reviews or publish "best of" articles put out by committees, regular expert columnists, and advertising.

The problematic issue with these two models is that each one appeals to a particular professional niche or interest.   However, the LLAMA community is an extremely diverse one that comes from all types of libraries, with a multitude of roles, and, as such, it defies a clearly-defined niche. The division has members from university libraries with research-centered "publish or perish" expectations alongside members from college settings who may be less interested in the research, but still write and read on practical, hands-on tips for day-to-day operations. In addition to the academic perspective, LLAMA has members from public and other community-centered libraries who face different leadership challenges and look to LL&M for insights. There are LLAMA members from large libraries that already have a built-in community for intellectual exchange and leadership development as well as members from smaller libraries who are reliant on self-development opportunities. The membership includes those whose leadership roles deal with a wide range of responsibilities, including infrastructure issues, such as buildings and equipment, services, personnel operations, promotional activities, such as marketing and fund raising, and all levels of administrative activity. LLAMA membership includes experienced leaders with formal administrative titles and emerging leaders whose roles may center around a project team or functional coordination and who

represent the future of library administration. In recent years, the LLAMA Board has participated in several extended conversations about understanding and providing value to the LLAMA membership. It is important that LL&M as the official publication of LLAMA be a part of this discussion and the outcomes from it.

Though LLAMA is more diverse than most ALA divisions, it is not the only one to face the challenge of responding to a range of member interests. ACRL, which has a more robust financial base, maintains two separate publications to address this need. Other divisions rely on a journal and newsletter model or have prioritized one model as more critical than the other and gone with it. In recent years, past editors of LL&M have tried both publication models and found that either model missed reaching out and connecting to some part of the LLAMA membership. Simultaneous with the move to the open access platform and reduced time-lag for copy-editing, the current Editors proposed a move to a new content model. This model merges together the concepts from the two different publication styles into one journal with a wider variety in the content it accepts and giving individual authors the option of choosing editorial review or blind peer review for their manuscript. Then at the point of publication, the individual articles are annotated to show the level and timing of the review process it went through. This allows us to address a variety of issues being faced by editors of publications across the profession as we seek to publish material that is high quality but also relevant and engaging to the reader community.

Authors publish for different reasons: some do it to simply share their knowledge and ideas in the hope that it will be useful to a peer somewhere else; some do it to challenge others to think about issues in a new way; and some do it because of expectations for promotion and/or tenure. However, even the expectations associated with the latter vary widely from institution to institution. Blind peer-review required for the publication to be "validated" represents one end of the continuum and the perspective that all publications are equal, regardless of venue or review process, rests at the other end. Many librarians live somewhere in the middle of the continuum, desiring a professional journal look and wider exposure to their work than a newsletter offers but not needing the deep qualitative verification of blind peer-review from experts. Additionally, those who publish for the greater good often prefer the more straightforward response on desired revisions and rapid turnaround that can be provided by the editor-review model. This model also allows for faster time-to-press for time-sensitive concerns. But for someone who has already put several months or even years into gathering data or conducting a comprehensive literature analysis to support an in-depth study, the extra couple of months are worth the credit that can come with the full "peer-reviewed" status. By offering both models within one journal, we are trying to be responsive to the potential authors in LLAMA, as well as the readership interests. This will allow us to provide manuscripts relevant to areas that have typically not followed a peer-review model, such as public libraries, as well as manuscripts relevant to larger academics that often seek the abstract or transferable knowledge perspective.

From the reader's perspective, this means the content of LL&M will vary more from issue to issue than in the past. Some issues may have more scholarly, blind peer-reviewed research features while others may have more editorial-styled pieces or experience base perspectives and practical advice that went through an editor reviewed process. This is not to say that review

by the editor is lacking in all rigor. As the editors for LL&M are chosen through a competitive application and selection process and are expected to have prior writing and editing experience, they do have knowledge of the literature of the profession, current topics of interest, and what a well-written manuscript looks like. But for a manuscript with extensive statistical or quantitative methodologies or one that deeply explores the background literature and underlying issues of an aspect of the professional landscape, we recognize that there are others among our membership who can better assess the true quality of the work and provide more accurately the validation sought by the author. However, because this process may be more demanding in terms of evaluating the work and requiring more revisions, it is going to take longer to accomplish. Similarly, because we use multiple reviewers for each manuscript going through the peer-review process, there may be conflicting feedback that the authors may have to address in their revisions.

From the editor's perspective, it is more work to keep the various manuscripts on their respective tracks with the efforts of both reviewing manuscripts ourselves and monitoring the peer review process. It also makes it more difficult to plan out future issues and accurately predict what the pipeline representing the flow of articles looks like. To date, the authors have been pretty evenly split on choosing editorial review or blind peer-review. When we decided to implement the model and contacted the authors who had manuscripts in progress, almost all chose editor review. Since then, as we have received new manuscripts, we have had a wave of authors that have requested blind peer review. One area that we will be exploring for the future is a process to pre-review manuscripts and possibly advise authors on whether we believe the manuscript is appropriate for the research-centered peer-review process or if it would be a better fit going through editorial review as an applied, innovative practices or professional insights piece. At this point, we hope to publish the first full blind peer reviewed, research articles in the August issue of the journal.

So if you are an author and have a manuscript in the works or a colleague with a manuscript that would speak to parts of the diverse LLAMA membership and are trying to decide where to send it, you will no longer have to exclude LL&M based on the issue of whether or not you want or need peer review. As a reader, we encourage you to watch for something new and different in every issue.

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