

## Rethinking Errata in the Online Journal Model

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As you have followed in our Editor's Columns and Editor's Introductions over the past year, you may have been aware that the move to our current online-only, open access model using OJS has been a developmental one; it has challenged traditional views on publishing and prompted us as editors to think about some issues in-depth as we make content and format decisions. One such issue confronted us last month, requiring us to address the treatment of errata in an online environment.

No matter what degree of copy editing is applied, everyone who has published with any regularity has had the experience of opening a journal to their article or flipping the pages of their brand new book and having an error jump out. The most common of these are minor typographical or grammatical errors leftover from the editing and re-editing process or autocorrect features in word processing programs. However, these errors can be more significant and lead to emotions ranging from anger to embarrassment on the part of the author, editor, and publisher.

One such event happened to me personally and still stands out in my memory was a incident with my first book. There had been a sudden change in Editors partway through the process and somehow my Author's Information was completely messed up. Unfortunately, because this content came after the index, it was not included with the final page proofs. Imagine my shock when I receive my first copy and what I had originally written was nowhere to be found. Instead what was published was a generic 2 sentence statement that attributed my MLS to a totally different institution than the one from which I had actually graduated. Needless to say, I was not a happy camper. At the time, the publisher did agree to put the updated author biographical statement on their website but could not do anything about the physical copies that had already been printed, distributed, and sold.

In print journals, when a significant error in content has occurred, the past practice has been to publish in the next issue an errata statement referencing back to the error in the previous issue. However, the passage of time and physical separation between the original publication and retraction or correction statement, has always put into question the true value of the subsequent errata statement in truly correcting the error for future readers. This is particularly an issue if the errata statement is tucked away in a corner or at the end of another piece, which as often happens as not in an effort to avoid impinging on page count.

Ever since *Library Leadership & Management* adopted our current online publication model, we and the authors have appreciated the ability it provided to make minor typographical or grammatical corrections after the issue went live and the new issue was announced, i.e. post-publication. This was part of the reason we were able to move away from using expensive file

conversion, typesetting, and copyediting services that required long lead times in preparing the journal. But this has also significantly increased the editors' workload and reduced the number of eyes reviewing the final article. Almost every issue has seen at least one correction request come through from an author. Usually these were very minor, a misspelled name or wrong preposition having been used in the original submission, caught very quickly, and having no impact on the content of the work. However, with the last issue, we had something different happen. Putting it simply, we goofed and, because the article was managed outside of the electronic submission system, there was no version control and we uploaded the original pre-review submission on a peer reviewed article instead of the final accepted manuscript. It even made it through the final review of the issue content. And of course, this was an article where the authors had made extensive revisions and improvements to the manuscript through the feedback and editing process. The authors realized what had happened a few weeks after the issue was made live and contacted us about what could be done, leading to an emergency discussion on the part of the editors that explored the implications of "fixing" the problem.

On the one hand, we knew several LLAMA members had probably already looked at the manuscript and changing it would challenge the traditional view of the "permanence" of publication that was associated with a journal. On the other hand, in context of the life of an article, we felt that the number of readers to date actually represented a small percentage of the eventual readership and professional impact of the work. In talking about possible options, the breadth and scope of the changes were such that the only way to issue a traditional-styled errata statement would be to republish the entire article in the next issue. However, this would create its own set of problems by perpetuating two totally different versions of the same manuscript, creating confusion in citation and referencing. We also felt that leaving up the wrong manuscript was a disservice to the reputation of the authors as it places out in the public marketplace a product that did not represent their best work. One option that we considered was retracting the incorrect manuscript from the February issue altogether and republish it in the May issue with the corrected manuscript, but this represented a significant feature article in the issue on a relevant and timely topic. As we talked about it, we considered the conundrum within the context of pre-prints, a concept we have discussed implementing in the past. Suppose the article had been published as a pre-print and the error discovered there...of course we would pull it and replace it with the corrected version. This helped us put into context that the sanctity of the "issue as released" had its roots in a mental model based on impregnating ink into paper and for us to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the electronic model was appropriate, so long as it was done with appropriate documentation.

What we decided to do was to go ahead and replace the manuscript in the February issue with the correct version. We amended the tracking information at the end of the PDF to note that this was an updated version had been published on February 28, 2012. We also decided to make sure and reference the updating of the manuscript somewhere in the May issue consistent with the traditional model of an errata statement. The only difference was that the erroneous information really wasn't available and the errata was not information that would have to be consciously integrated in the original reading but a replacement. We also decided to find a way to implement a more robust pre-publication proofing process, that will let authors see what is actually going to be published prior to going live, even if it did add to the workload and

acceptance timelines or might delay the release of the issue by a couple of days. This practice was implemented with this current issue and admittedly we feel more comfortable with it. We are waiting to see if someone still finds a post-publication typo...my bet is yes. Ironically, last month I observed a similar event occur in the local newspaper. An editorial on a “hot topic” came out, obviously rushed, and attributed an inflammatory comment to the wrong individual. The next day, an errata came out with a note about the correction and included in the statement was the information that the online copy of the article had been replaced with the corrected version.

So if you read the article “Speaking Up: Empowering Individuals to Promote Tolerance in the Academic Library” by Jeffrey Knapp, Loanne Snively, and Linda Klimczyk during the month of February, please go back to <http://journals.tdl.org/llm/article/view/5508/5849> and give it another read through to give the authors credit for the work they put into the manuscript and the valuable information they had added in response to the peer reviewer’s feedback.

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