

Inside the Journal: Sustaining and Growing the Journal

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, FEB 19 2014

This week The Ivory Tower presents a five part series about life inside an academic journal. In this third part we explore the challenges to sustaining and developing the reputation of a journal, and the work of the editorial board in growing a journal's audience. Previous parts in the series can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Launching a journal is one thing but sustaining interest in a journal and developing the audience for a journal is quite another. *Central European University Political Science Journal* Managing Editor Sergiu Gherghina explains some of the ways that he and his team sought contributions for the young publication.

"In its first two years of existence the journal has been a graduate review and we were sending call for papers within CEU and to partner universities of CEU," he said. "For example, when CEU launched its call for study applications, they also included an ad about the journal. We have also sent official letters to deans or rectors of universities in Central and Eastern Europe with a free printed copy of the journal."

Getting hard copies of the new journal into the hands of potential contributors at key institutions saw the *CEU PSJ* develop a network of more than 60 institutions across the world. Targeting academic libraries, research centres and universities, the editorial team sought to raise the profile of a publication competing for eyes in a crowded marketplace of ideas. As the journal moved away from its original focus on graduate level work, the board started distributing their calls for contributions to academic e-groups focussed on Central and Eastern Europe, to the academic networks of editorial and advisory board members, and advertising direct to potential authors at the annual conferences in political science organised by CEU.

Sergiu recalls the key problems faced by the editorial board in the early days of the journal, noting in particular the problems of securing quality contributions while still largely unknown and finding qualified reviewers for the journal. "These referees are a scarce resource and it is very difficult to persuade people to invest time in writing a review for a publication that is young – especially when no one knows if it will last," he said. "This problem was partly overcome thanks to the generous efforts of many members of the editorial and advisory boards who personally wrote several reviews per year in the first years of the journals existence."

For Sergiu these early years were also a period of learning how to manage an international journal. He worked hard to establish processes and systems to enable the journal to function successfully despite its dispersed editorial board and trans-European scope. As the journal grew in stature and reputation, Sergiu carved out a role for himself that became integral to the continued success of the journal.

Quizzing Sergiu on the most important part of his job leads to a detailed and measured response. "It is hard to define the most important role," he says, "I would rather say that there are three crucial roles: first, an editor should be the filter for all submissions; second, an editor should be able to identify at least two appropriate reviewers for each article topic; and third, an editor should be able to differentiate the good from the bad peer-review comments."

The first of these, Sergiu explains, involves an aggressive quality control screening that sees some 50% of submissions be returned to the authors without being sent out for review. Papers that do not fit the profile of the journal, are descriptive rather than analytical, or that don't meet the journal's minimum requirements in terms of

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format, length and language are immediately rejected.

The review process, too, is a critical role for an editor. The *CEU PSJ* uses a three person blind peer-review process and the good connections and networks of the editorial and advisory boards help to ensure that qualified peer reviewers can always be found.

Finally, the editor must make the final decision with regards to the quality of the reviews that are returned. Where a referee has returned a review that is not to the standards of the journal or where quality is problematic, the editor must send the paper out for additional comments. As Sergiu makes clear, "My personal belief is that no editor should make a decision based on poor reviews."

This commitment to quality that the journal has maintained and the role of the editorial board in maintaining this commitment has seen the journal grow in strength over recent years. Today more than 80% of that papers that are sent out for review are rejected, a testament to the quality control measures that have helped sustain the journal and drive its growth.

About the author:

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