
EDITORIAL

Editorial

Simon Lightfoot

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The seed for this journal was sown when as external examiner for an undergraduate course I reviewed a dissertation on the politics of street furniture design. This innovative dissertation examined how street furniture, such as public seating, was increasingly designed to prevent people sleeping on them. Walking through the city after the meeting I observed how new public seating had arms rests or was angled to help you rest- anything but lie down! This piece of work had changed how I viewed the city and that got me thinking that it was a shame that only myself and perhaps two markers would read this piece of work. A year or so later I was pondering a change to assessment criteria for dissertations that mentioned that the work should be of “publishable quality”. If this was a criterion then shouldn’t there be an outlet for such high quality undergraduate work? If as universities we are serious about research-led teaching shouldn’t there be an opportunity for some students to publish their work? The phrasing for Politics and IR is a bit awkward but my colleagues in chemistry or biology talk of undergraduates as ‘chemists in training’. Introducing our students into a community of practice during their undergraduate years can lead to a range of pedagogic and employability benefits (see Page, 2015). Disciplines increasingly recognise that undergraduate work can be of publishable quality, can be innovative and can move research forward. We increasingly talk of students as partners in their learning (see Healey et al, 2014) and so we need to offer opportunities for our students to demonstrate the value of this partnership.

Undergraduate journals in Politics and IR are not new (see Mariani et al, 2013), indeed my own school published high quality dissertations online for a number of years. So why this journal? The aim of this journal is to provide an entry point for undergraduate students to start their research journey. The key difference between UJPIR and many student journals is that we ask students to revisit their original research (often a dissertation or assessment) and make it fit the scope of the journal. Those that do are then peer reviewed by academic staff, including PhD students, much like the classic model

utilised by nearly all academic journals (thus the journal is different to *Clocks and Clouds* for example, see Cowell-Meyer et al, 2015). The student needs to respond to the peer review, and this response is considered as part of the publication decision. UJPIR therefore acts just like the academic journals I and my colleagues publish in. Our vision is to complement those journals (and indeed some undergraduate work does get published in traditional journals) by offering an alternative outlet sympathetic to the career stage of the contributors. The first issue is made up of contributions from students who went to six different UK universities and as such reflects our goals:

- To introduce students to research disciplines and the publishing process
- To provide politics and IR students with the opportunity to gain critical skills in professional research
- To encourage undergraduates to write at an academic level
- To make the results of undergraduate research accessible to everyone

Lots of people have made the first issue a reality and space is too limited to thank them all. This has been a real team effort and I am very grateful to everyone who has reviewed articles for the journal or edited contributions or just generally supported the journal. The financial support of the Higher Education Academy via the National Teaching Fellowship scheme has been invaluable as has the financial support we received from various other supporters including the Laidlaw Fund, the Political Studies Association and the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds. We hope you enjoy the first issue!

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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