

Research Use and Scholarship in Education (*Research USE*)

A proposal to the SIG on Research Use for establishment and support of an open access peer reviewed journal

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Introduction

As noted in its bylaws, the SIG on Research Use (SIGRU) has as its mission the mandate to “generate and disseminate knowledge related to the ways in which research is used to improve education policy and practice, and to foster improvement of the dissemination and use of research findings.” Pursuant to that mission, the SIG facilitates dissemination of research on research use through sessions at the AERA AGM and through AERA communications resources (e-mail lists, AERA journals, and the web site). The purpose of this document is to propose that SIGRU expand its activities to include publication of an online journal and to present a business model to support such publication.

Rationale

SIGRU currently has more than 80 members whose interests and research activities are at least in part focused on research use. The SIG supports the interests of its members by affiliating with AERA to provide a platform for the sharing of research and scholarship at the association’s annual meeting. While this helps create a focused scholarly community, it is a limited mechanism for promoting research use. An open access journal would provide a much broader platform for research dissemination, while also supporting the interests and careers of SIGRU members by providing a credible publication outlet for scholarship focused specifically on research use.

Context

Currently, in the realm of research use there are only two journals focused on research utilization: *Science Communication* (SC) and *Evidence and Policy*. SC is the progeny of *Knowledge*, a

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journal originally published by SIGRU. Over the course of its life, SC has evolved away from its research use roots, now focusing more on communication of research in the sciences than on the scholarship of research utilization. Published by SAGE, access to SC content is restricted to subscribers (\$40 per issue or \$183 per year for individuals, a minimum of \$1,149.00 for institutional subscription), and so generally unavailable to the broader community of policymakers and educators, most notably teachers and school district administrators. Similarly, *Evidence and Policy* costs \$38.71 per article or \$168 for an annual subscription and covers evidence use across all social sciences with a less specific focus on research use in education and related fields.

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Need

The scholarship of research use extends back decades, and has commanded great attention in policy and practice. Current efforts to improve the connections between research, policy, and practice are found in policy at all levels of government and internationally, evidenced in accountability policies, the development of clearinghouses such as *What Works*, and IES funding for knowledge utilization centers. Funding priorities set by foundations such as the W.T. Grant Foundation and the emergence of a number of research-practice partnerships linking university- and think tank-based researchers to practitioners around problems of practice have also helped to advance the field. Recognition of the importance of research use is widespread, yet a venue for communicating the value of this work is generally absent. The current lack of journals publishing research on research utilization creates a unique opportunity for the SIG. The subscriber-based business model of the current journal concerned with research use (SC), highlights an access gap—where an open access journal could enter the market with little direct competition.

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Open Access (OA)

Once seen as a curiosity, the open access movement in research has reached the mainstream. Open Access refers to the practice of publishing research online, with no charge to users for access to the articles—essentially “open access” to research. By eliminating the cost of print publication and mailing, Open Access allows for a much more cost-effective publishing model and as such is a major force for the democratization of knowledge.

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Research published in open access journals is now widely respected and many for-profit publishers have entered on OA domain. That said, open access business models have created an opportunity for predatory publishers to enter the field, charging authors exorbitant fees for publication of articles with little to no review or publication support. This has created a credibility gap for some researchers and research consumers. As a result, many open access journals find it important to affiliate with a professional organization as one measure of quality control and credibility. By sponsoring its own OA journal, SIGRU could both increase

dissemination of member research and help ensure journal quality. Additional support could be sought from other affiliations as well, including granting bodies like the WT Grant Foundation or the Spenser Foundation.

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Focus and Scope

Research Use is a broad term that includes two powerful streams: research *on* research use (how do we explore the use of research in policy and practice); and research *communication* (how can we improve the communication of research findings). It includes theoretical interrogation of research use (what are the underlying philosophical issues and mechanisms involved in research use); empirical examination of research use (what data can we gather to interrogate activities related to research use); and application of research (how can we apply research to problems of education policy and practice). A journal supported by SIGRU should support these three strands across the two topic areas.

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Business Model

As open access journals have increased in quantity and quality, adopting an appropriate business model has become more important. In its infancy, open access journals could be (and were) published off the side of the desk of interested faculty. Now however, publishers need to plan for costs related to presentation, web hosting and support, peer review, copy-editing, design and layout, and promotion. While the printing costs have been transferred from publishers to the end users, the other costs associated with the quality publication of research remain. Many of these costs can be off-set through in-kind contributions of the scholars and institutions involved; however, new journals need to carefully plan to address these areas if they are to implement a sustainable publication.

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Platform

One of the primary concerns related to journal production is the publication platform. For open access journals, that platform is the world wide web (for traditional journals the platform would be paper publication). While at its base, hand coding articles in html (or through a wysiwyg editor) gives everyone a platform for publication, more sophisticated systems for publication exist. These systems can help coordinate article submission, peer review, publication, presentation, and dissemination, and run the gamut from no cost, to thousands of dollars annually. The Open Journal System (OJS), created by the Public Knowledge Project (housed at Simon Fraser University) is one such system that provides free publication software to interested users with adequate technical knowledge to install and maintain the software, or as a hosted system for an annual fee. The OJS is a high quality, field-tested, system, and is currently used by AERA for its own journals. It can be tailored for both open access and fee-based publication models. Assuming adequate technical knowledge exists within the SIG, the new journal could use the OJS platform at minimal cost.

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Content

D No business plan or publication model can succeed without access to quality content. By affiliating with SIGRU and other organizations, the journal would have direct access to researchers and scholars involved in research use. By requiring all published authors to be SIG (and therefor AERA) members, the journal can create a strong pipeline into the field for existing scholars, expanding the SIGRU membership base and increasing membership value.

R Ideally content would be organized in three sections as detailed above: theoretical interrogation of research use (philosophical issues); empirical examination of research use (tests of theory, evaluation of programs, products, or systems); and application of research (meta-analysis and meta-synthesis; literature reviews; case studies; and policy analyses). Editorials and/or book reviews could also be added to the journal sections as desired by the editors. Ideally, each section would have a lead editor affiliated with the SIG.

Peer review

A Another major resource requirement for journals is peer review and coordination of review by editors. While the OJS platform can make peer reviewer easier, it cannot eliminate the production costs incurred (including reviewer and editor time). For most journals, such costs are provided in-kind by editors and reviewers as part of their service commitments. By affiliating with SIGRU, the journal could tap an existing pool of research use scholars, as both editors and reviewers. Additionally, papers submitted to the AERA Annual meeting under the auspices of the SIG could receive preliminary acceptance by the journal, increasing the value of the review done for the annual meeting by SIG members, and speeding the dissemination of high quality research.

Publication

F The final major cost associated with journals relates to article publication: copyediting and layout. These costs can be considerable when done professionally and serve as the primary justification for the article processing fees required by many open access journals. While the journal could choose not to copyedit articles, professional copyediting provides substantial value for both article authors and journal readers (nothing detracts from the content of an article like mistakes in grammar and presentation). Professional copyediting runs \$300-\$400 per 6000 word article and generally does not include layout. That said, layout can be left in the hands of the editors (or included in copyediting) assuming a user-friendly article template is available.

T The simplest solution is to require all authors to have their article copyedited by a professional copyeditor, and to maintain a list of acceptable copyeditors on the web site. Rather than providing copy editing as a service, the journal could require authors to work through one of the approved copyediting vendors prior to publication. In this way, the journal avoids having to create and maintain a financial infrastructure, or pay for these services. It also increases the

transparency related to production costs by allowing authors to work directly with the vendors. For authors who cannot afford this rather nominal charge, SIGRU could provide a limited number of “scholarships” using SIG funds.

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Capacity

With a potential review body of 90+/- members, and assuming a 50% acceptance rate (given the use of preliminary acceptance for AGM submissions), the journal could publish 15-45 articles each year (1-3 articles per reviewer, three reviews per article, 30-90 submissions). A realistic goal would be to focus on the low end—15 articles per year for the first three years (see *Staffing* below).

Budget

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The table below highlights the projected costs for basic article delivery. This is a rough estimate for discussion purposes. A realistic estimate of costs would run around \$200 per year. There would likely be additional startup costs for initial template design and art work, running to \$400. Initial promotion through advertising would be helpful as far as engaging new audiences, and while some promotion could be done through free resources (like AERA list serves) print advertising could quickly engage external audiences (as an example, advertising in the AERA conference book can be obtained for \$1700).

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Some revenue will be generated by requiring authors (or submitters) to be members of the SIG. At the current dues level (\$5) revenue generation would be limited; however even a small dues increase could generate steady revenue for the journal.

Table 1: Budget expenditure projections

Cost Centre	Annual item cost	Number of items	Minimum cost	Maximum Cost
Platform	\$50-\$850	1	\$50	\$900
Technology infrastructure (computer/server; production software)	in-kind - \$800 (aggregated over 5 years)	1	0	\$800
Editorship	\$15,000 (in-kind at 50% of 1/3 of a faculty salary))	3	in-kind	in-kind
Copyediting and layout	\$0 if author funded; \$400 if journal funded	15	0	\$6000
Dues revenue	\$5-15 (if dues increased)	50 (assuming 50 submissions)	+250	+\$750
Advertising and promotion	\$2000	1	0	\$2000
Total			+\$200	\$8,950

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Staffing

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The journal could operate under a variety of staffing models, but where possible, division of labour can help increase capacity. Ideally, three editors would be responsible for separate areas of delivery: peer review; hosting, web design, and maintenance; and layout and delivery.

Despite the sharing of responsibilities, the editor responsible for peer review will carry the bulk of the work load. While many journals tap a wide body of reviewers, ideally Research USE would tap in to the SIG membership and create an editorial board willing to commit to timely review of up to five articles a year. An initial Board of 15 SIG members with such a commitment could review up to 25 articles in the first year.

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Implementation

Once approved, implementation of the journal could be quite fast, assuming that articles would be released as they complete the review and copyediting cycle and are available for submission soon after the annual meeting (or are already completed works held by SIG members). An aggressive timeline could have the SIG releasing articles within 3 months of official start up. Another three months of development time (creating a template, installing software and setting up the technical infrastructure, coordinating review panels) is likely before article submission could be made, bringing the time to initial publication to six month after approval.

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An initial plan for promoting the journal could include advertising at key conferences (including AERA) which showcase the scholarship of research use, direct communication with universities and research centers, and use of social media to become part of online communities working in the areas of research use as well as educational policy and practice. Increasing visibility ensures both readership and quality manuscript submissions in the start-up phase.

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Conclusion

The journal would be an open access journal published on the OJS platform; edited by three SIGRU members overseeing an editorial review board of 15-30 SIGRU members; and accepting papers from members on research use theory, practice, and application (including preliminary acceptance of AGM paper presentations). To fully engage SIG members, a formal proposal should be made prior to the 2015 annual meeting and formally voted on at the business meeting.

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Links

Public knowledge project: <http://pkp.sfu.ca>

Science Communication: <http://scx.sagepub.com>

Education Policy: http://www.policypress.co.uk/journals_eap.asp