

# **The Canadian Association of Learned Journals (CALJ) / L'Association canadienne des revues savantes (ACRS)**

**Response to SSHRC Transformation document “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council,” with a focus on research dissemination through scholarly based journals**

## **I. Background**

The Canadian Association of Learned Journals (CALJ) was organized in 1990 to ensure the well-being of learned journals in Canada as important disseminators of scholarly work. The purpose of CALJ is also to promote intellectual culture in Canada and internationally. In February 2004, CALJ was incorporated as a not-for-profit organization.

CALJ is a forum in which issues of concern to scholarly journals are addressed. Annual meetings during the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences feature workshops in editorial procedures, production, distribution and funding.

CALJ currently lists over 100 Canadian journals. In the near future, CALJ aims at creating a comprehensive listing of Canadian scholarly journals.

## **II. Dissemination of research**

### **1. Changing patterns**

New fields of research, as well as inter- and multidisciplinary collaborative research, are placing new requirements on the scholarly communication system. New drivers such as globalization and information technologies are changing the paradigm of scholarly publishing.

There is no recent national study of the Canadian scholarly communication system. A project (*Optimizing the Transformation of Knowledge Dissemination: Towards a Canadian Research Strategy*) was undertaken in January 2003 by the Canadian Association of Research

Libraries, but the results have not yet been released. The challenges, the impacts of globalization, new technologies and government policies on scholarly publication are yet to be explored in a comprehensive fashion.

Today, the question of electronic distribution remains an issue for many journals. What is most needed is recognition of a transition period where both print and electronic publications are supported. Given technological challenges (archiving, etc.), legal issues and the lack of a portal for scholarly research in Canada, we do not know what will happen to a given electronic medium or file within a given period of time. We do know that print copies will be available. Therefore, there is a need to maintain the present system of peer-reviewed journals, while developing parallel models in electronic format, for current print journals. By allowing multiple attempts at electronic manuscript handling, publishing and Web interface, experimentation could be fed in a portal if there is a coordinated and well-funded response from government.

## 2. The role of scholarly journals

Academic journals do more than just provide the mechanics to enable the uptake of knowledge—what is referred to in “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council” as a mediator’s role. Academic journals also provide an imprimatur that is recognized and depended upon by contributors and users alike because of the rigor by which a journal ensures the quality of scholarly material within its pages. More importantly, many journals commission research in the forms of single articles, book reviews, reports and entire issues with the goal of refereed publication. By playing a proactive role in the creation of research, the journal initiates the interactive engagement between researcher and user.

Researchers are both the creators and consumers of scholarly knowledge. For tenure and promotion requirements, the emphasis is placed on publication. When evaluation committees meet, what they value is peer-reviewed research. Scholarly journals ensure quality control and play a major role in the academic community. They are the main way of disseminating research in Canada. Without them, there is nothing to disseminate to the general population.

## 3. Publisher responsibility

Marketing and distribution of journal content falls within the responsibilities of the publisher. The journal publisher assumes copyright and can grant certain republishing rights, in whole or part, to others. However, reasonable measures must be taken to ensure that the intellectual integrity continues to be honoured, a concern that has come about with third-party release of the material through media driven by time and market pressures. It would also be a concern if journal material was to be reworked for republication in “scholarly-based journals for a lay audience” as described by “From Granting Council to Knowledge Council.”

### **III. Research and scholarly based journals**

#### **1. Knowledge-impact**

We must maintain the current journal system as a way of ensuring academic excellence through peer review. Journals serve as an important filter to ensure validity and understandability. With the output of journals as pre-filtered foundation, other funds can be brought to the task of bringing those results into public discourse.

Among the two additional core values for SSHRC, we note interactive engagement and maximum knowledge impact (point 9; SSHRC transformation document). Are we moving from “academic excellence” to “maximum impact”? The latter term is harder to determine and measure. Can we argue that a journal with fewer than 400 subscribers has inadequate impact but a journal with more subscribers has more impact? Indeed, the number of subscribers to a journal is a poor measure of its importance. This is not only true because institutional subscriptions represent far more readers than the single subscription, but also because the knowledge contained may be tremendously important to a small but important audience.

Currently, from a qualitative point of view, what is meant by impact factor is a measure of how many times on the average articles published in that journal are cited by other journals (see the Institute for Scientific Information database: *Journal Citation Reports*, 2001; or other databases). It helps to evaluate the journal’s relative importance when compared with others in the same field. The journal’s immediacy index is a measure of how quickly the average article in a journal is cited in a given year. On-line journals may present an advantage over print journals in

terms of impact, by being accessible to a larger audience of researchers. However, it should be noted that libraries can drop their print subscriptions if they do not have enough resources to keep both print and electronic versions of a journal. Journals cannot afford the loss of income related to selling print journals. As well, the public, which enjoys easy access to print copies on libraries' shelves might lose that privilege with electronic journals, by not being members of the academic community (access codes).

Many of the scholarly journals published in Canada are small and depend upon government grants to survive. Our reading of the report is that money will go to the founding of new scholarly journals for lay audiences (with the hiring of writers), but it is not clear whether these would be in addition to the journals already receiving support or to replace them. **We strongly recommend that SSHRC continue and expand its program of support for scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences. We suggest that the journal community develop a plan in conjunction with SSHRC to ensure the preservation of the strengths of what we have while adding on new dimensions that might serve society better.**

Last, not all scholarly journals are alike. While many are indeed composed of experts discussing topics with specialized language, some journals have been interdisciplinary and accessible both in language and length since their inception. Except for the book reviews, all content of "X" is peer reviewed for a global audience of readers ranging from post-secondary students to senior scholars, community activists, policy makers and some interested members of the general public.

## 2. Bridging the gap: Scholarly based journals for lay audiences?

In attempting to encourage the circulation of knowledge in society, it is important to ensure that the heterogeneity of interests that are represented by business, policy makers and the many different elements of Canada's multilateral civil society are equally well served. Synthesis is a different task from scholarly publishing, and the need to trickle down to the rest of society must be addressed with caution and with the most appropriate means.

Both the core values of maximizing dissemination and interactive engagement are fine goals, but it is not clear whether the “lay journals” idea is the best solution, especially if there is a plan to “rewrite” an author’s work to make it more appealing. The academic community, in an attempt to push out the knowledge it generates for society, might work with other institutions to encourage the utilization of that knowledge. Funding could be made available to journals to provide lay summaries of their articles. These could be done by journalists or editors. Fresh marketing ideas could be explored on a journal-by-journal basis.

### 3. Conferences

One way to enhance research communication would be for SSHRC to develop a system allowing conference organizers to publish proceedings on the Web. This will require a way of filtering the best of what is presented and ensuring that it is of interest to public discourse.

The Congress provides an invaluable opportunity for editors of interdisciplinary journals to attend a diverse group of programs and to speak to researchers, requesting that they send their papers to the journal for consideration. In doing so, journals benefit from being able to have direct access to a broad range of cutting-edge research.

Report prepared by Brigitte Lévy, President CALJ, April 16, 2004.