

The Value of Academic Journal Experience

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Although graduate work can be a tedious, labor intensive process, opportunities abound. Coursework is of central importance; however, without the proper context of professional experience, a graduate program's potential cannot be fully realized. Graduate students are wise to accompany their studies with relevant employment, internships, volunteering, conferences, professional development workshops, and other research. The lessons learned in the field can be applied in the classroom and vice-versa. Professional work outside of coursework plays another critical role as it can help guide the student in choosing a specific academic or non-academic career path.

Across disciplines, most graduate students are familiar with academic journal articles that are often required reading. Unfortunately, despite openings, few graduate students participate in the journal publication process. Journal roles include, but are not limited to the following: submitting articles, proofreading submissions, peer reviewing, and collaborating with a journal editor and/or academic on the actual publication process through platforms such as Open Journal Systems. There is a diversity of opportunities in a variety of contexts. As both a Master's and Doctoral student, I have been fortunate to participate in this process.

First, as a Master's student at the University of Michigan, I submitted an article to an online academic journal. Even though the article was not accepted, I both learned from and enjoyed the process. Reading the journal instructions, completing the article and sending it off for submission was an exciting undertaking, much different from submitting the typical course paper. Because I was boldly sending my ideas into the wider world, I took great care in reviewing each word, idea, and phrase. I took the written feedback to heart. Although my work was not published, the formal recognition was validation enough.

As a Graduate Research Assistant at George Mason University, I had the opportunity to collaborate on the journal process with a professor in the College of Education and Human Development. Through methodical data entry, case studies and literature reviews, I witnessed the systematic process required to obtain evidence for the foundation of a research article. It was a wonderful window into the real world of academia. I also had the chance to participate in the peer review process and, with the guidance of the professor, edit journal submissions. I highly recommend collaborating with faculty members on journals.

Additionally, I was fortunate to secure a research internship with a professional association: the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. Although the internship offered a number of valuable experiences and helped shape my research interests, my work with the *Journal of Student Financial Aid* was most rewarding. I fondly recall the first moment I saw my name published as an editorial staffer. In January of 2013, the *Journal of Student Financial Aid* editorial board accepted a book review of mine on college cost and quality. It was not published until late September of that year, after roughly a half dozen revisions. I was able to experience, first hand, the methodical, intense process of high level research and academic writing. Just when I thought the review was finished, there was more to be done. The hard work was worth it. I will never forget sending my first published work to friends and family. Each month, I received a readership report documenting the number of downloads. I was surprised to find that hundreds if not thousands of people had read my work. It was a rich, rewarding experience.

I see my present work as a Graduate Professional Assistant with the *Journal of Mason Graduate Research* as a continuation of these efforts. It has been a pleasure to be involved in this graduate student run undertaking. Everything from the marketing and web design to peer-reviews, editing, and article submissions is done by a George Mason graduate student. We have attracted article submitters, editorial board members and peer reviewers from across disciplines. As we move forward, we continue to solicit articles, publish them on a rolling basis, and seek additional volunteers to serve on the board, copy-edit and/or peer-review.

This innovative graduate student-led journal is a living manifestation of academia's commitment to teaching, research and service. *Journal of Mason Graduate Research* participants have taught through trainings and written feedback; researched through article submissions, and volunteered their time as an act of service. Whether you decide to participate in this journal or

some other, I strongly encourage you to do so. Working for an academic journal gives one a preview for the life of a researcher. Regardless of the profession you choose, journal work develops transferable skills, a sense of community and academic relevance. Therefore, I strongly encourage you to join our team! Currently, the *Journal of Mason Graduate Research* Editorial Board is recruiting new editors, copy-editors and peer reviewers. For additional information, please contact jmgr.assistant@gmail.com or jmgr.peer.review@gmail.com.

As we conclude our first volume, let us give thanks for the four excellent articles that were published. We began with John Lunsford's "Innovation in the Tropics: An Autoethnography of a Multidisciplinary Field School" that told the story of his Anthropological field work in Bali, Indonesia followed by Josh Yavelberg's article on Art History pedagogy titled, "Questioning the Survey: A Look into Art History Survey and its Pedagogical Practices." The latest installment includes Yolanda Gibson's "The Impact of Mentoring Programs for African American Male Community College Students" and "Using Video Games in Education" by Meghan Arias. We have published a diversity of topics from a variety of disciplines. In keeping with this diversity, our next volume will contain an "emergent theme." We look forward to your contributions and thank those who made this first volume possible. Those include but are not limited to the following: Mary Zamon and Jaime Lester (faculty mentors), Anne Driscoll (library consultant), the *Journal of Mason Graduate Research* Editorial Board, volunteer peer reviewers and copy-editors and last but not least, the authors themselves.