What Now? A Reflection on the First Several Years of JMGR

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In Fall 2011, I had the pleasure of being enrolled in a wonderful course held by Dr. Mary Zamon on institution and program assessment in education where all students were grouped and assigned to authentic projects connected with volunteered external initiatives. The results of these projects were impressive and the course ended with a question "what now?" The projects in many graduate courses end with the class. As many course projects contain a great amount of work and research, but inform only the student, instructor, and sometimes the peers within the class. This unfortunate truth bothered Dr. Zamon and the students of CTCH826, especially as she asked the class, "what now?"

We discussed the issue and noted that the research projects would not make a professional journal given their level. Though the undergraduate schools had a research publication, there was no publication on campus that supported the research efforts of graduate students. Dr. Zamon then suggested that we begin our own and several of us jumped at the idea to begin such an initiative on campus. We consulted other universities' graduate research journals, attended workshops, and together with the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GAPSA) and the library a digital space was provided under the current Open Journal System (OJS) that houses other George Mason journals. Each step was new and we quickly began to notice that this initiative was bigger than we first assumed. We were given the space and initial support of the University, but what now?

My role in the journal was initially that of technician. I volunteered as the "Web Director," though that role became stretched to also include layout, graphic design, and other necessary duties. As we moved toward our first publication, each of the founding members were

required to become creative and apply ourselves to fill holes as issues arose throughout the process. When I initially volunteered, I figured that my web design knowledge would help to get the journal moving digitally and I would learn the basic process for publication and the online programming would handle the rest. The rapid growth proved otherwise as we found that it would be necessary to house content outside of the journal space for record keeping, promotion, and training. This expanded the journal to a Wordpress site, Google accounts for all members to collaborate efficiently, and a move into social media with Facebook and Twitter. Posters had to be made as well as a logo developed for promotions, so my graphic design knowledge was also put to use. As an author, I also became involved in the editing process, making my piece stronger through an extremely challenging peer review. Finally, as we neared the first issue's publication, a standardized layout was necessary that could be applied to all documents, so again I had to utilize a range of skills to bring about a successful first volume.

These tasks were often a result of responding to issues that arose in real time, as we would constantly be asking ourselves, "what now?" The first volume was focused mainly within the School of Education allowing us to work where we were most comfortable, but also learn. We learned how to develop relationships across the campus, recruit members, train peer reviewers, develop rubrics and methods of assessment, copy edit, layout documents, obtain ISSNs, and finally publish an issue, then a volume, complete with editorials. With a complete volume published, we believed we might be done with the question of "what now?" but the journal now had a new task, survival.

With now a year and a half completed and a formal product, many of the board members looked to move on. We needed to develop modes of transition. A new board sprang together with enthusiasm and expanded the journal to other schools across the university, opened the publication to more writing styles including Modern Language Association (MLA) and Chicago Manual of Style. I was tasked with developing a rubric to assess creative projects that might be delivered from the fine, applied, or performing arts disciplines. Quickly the journal jumped in submissions from eight the first year to more than twenty this second round. Reviewer turnover was constant, and still we required more in terms of maintaining a system – a challenge that I found myself in the middle of frequently as I oversaw this asynchronous digital management system.

The new board also pressed to make JMGR a fixture within the student organizations by formalizing the constitution, conducting the necessary applications, and gaining funding. These initiatives brought the journal closer to even more organizations on campus, which brought to light issues that we overlooked in our first volume. The legal requirements of the university required us to change our logo. Furthermore, publishing a printed version of the journal required further collaborations that we never dreamed of when we began this journey.

The development of this journal has been a journey. The experience has allowed me to learn about every facet of the journal publication process in an environment that encouraged individual pursuit. I was able to take charge of challenges as they arose and spearhead initiatives that answered the question "what now?" It has been an extreme pleasure working with the many talented volunteers and graduate assistants that have been a part of the journal and I look forward to looking back as future generations of volunteers answer this same question, "what now?"