



Improving Student Journal Visibility via the Directory of Open Access Journals

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Directory of Open Access Journals

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Abstract: In this interview with Judith Barnsby, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), we look at how student-run journals could enhance their visibility by joining DOAJ. We highlight the general and student journal-specific application requirements for inclusion in DOAJ, known challenges with the application process, and recommendations for student journals that want to apply. The interview is conducted by Mariya Maistrovskaya, University of Toronto Libraries, the Interviewer.

Keywords: Student journal publishing, indexing, open access publishing, DOAJ, Directory of Open Access Journals

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Introduction

Student-led academic journals are on the rise in North America (Ng et al., 2017), yet their content is not easy to find online. While professional academic journals usually seek to improve their discoverability via scholarly indexes and databases, very few student-led journals are indexed in such venues. For example, in Canada, out of 200+ currently publishing student journals, only eight are indexed in the [Directory of Open Access Journals \(DOAJ\)](#) (Maistrovskaya, 2023).

DOAJ indexes high-quality open-access journals from anywhere in the world, in any discipline and language. There is no cost for journals to apply nor for readers to access the index

as it is openly available online. Being included in DOAJ grants a journal both the recognition of quality and a boost in visibility via DOAJ's directory and other search services that use its data.

DOAJ welcomes applications from student-led journals. In this interview with DOAJ's Judith Barnsby, we explore why and how student journals may apply, what challenges they may encounter, and what a successful application would look like.

Interview

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to the interview. To start, could you say a few words about the Directory of Open Access Journals - what it is and why would a journal want to be included?

DOAJ: DOAJ is a global index covering only fully open-access journals and is used by many libraries, services, and funding organizations worldwide as a source of reputable open-access journals. Inclusion in DOAJ would give a student journal visibility in many search services and show it meets recognized criteria of quality and openness.

Interviewer: Do you have a sense of how many student journals DOAJ includes?

DOAJ: It's difficult to give an exact figure, as student journals are not specifically flagged within the DOAJ system. It's fair to say, though, that we could include a lot more, as many people don't realize that we will index student journals, as many other databases do not accept them.

Interviewer: I have searched two hundred Canadian student journal titles against DOAJ, and I came up with eight that are indexed.

DOAJ: So, we could definitely do a lot better.

Interviewer: Could you briefly outline the DOAJ inclusion requirements and the application process that a journal would follow?

DOAJ: There is a set of basic criteria that all journals must meet in order to be indexed in DOAJ. This covers issues such as the journal website, editorial processes, copyright, and licensing. More details are given at [DOAJ's Guide to Applying](#).

Interviewer: Would you say the current inclusion criteria allow student journals to apply?

DOAJ: Yes, we encourage student journals to apply, and have a specific criterion in our guide to applying that is specifically for student-run journals. The requirement is that if a journal is run by a student body, there must be an advisory board for the journal, where at least two members have a PhD or equivalent qualification. That's the only extra thing we ask for.

Interviewer: Could you say more about the impetus for having that specific requirement for student journals?

DOAJ: The reason for it is to ensure that there is some level of faculty or more senior oversight of the editorial process. Just to ensure that things are being done to the right standard with the help of people who are more experienced in research and in publishing their work.

Interviewer: It's interesting that the requirement is phrased as "PhD or equivalent." So I wonder whether, for example, a librarian who has a faculty status at a university would qualify as being an advisor in that case?

DOAJ: Yes. We say that because not all subjects require a PhD. For instance, if it was a medical journal - and some student medical journals are indexed in DOAJ - there will be a medical doctor rather than a PhD who provides oversight.

Interviewer: This is very helpful to know. We don't want students to think, "Oh, we don't have two PhD advisors, so this is a 'no'." It's good to know that depending on the discipline, there may be other opportunities.

DOAJ: Yes, I think that's important. Because it's easy to assume that it is only PhDs who are qualified to oversee a journal, and that is not necessarily the case. We have to try and cover all subjects in DOAJ.

Interviewer: And would you say that you receive student journal applications often?

DOAJ: We can receive them at any time, but we don't get very many in total compared to the overall number of applications (on average over 800 per month). One question to ask is: do student editors know or care about being indexed? Or if they do know, do they assume that their journal wouldn't be eligible?

Perhaps there is a view that a student journal is not going to be of interest to the wider world or to indexing services. And there's no reason why they shouldn't be of interest if they are producing good research.

Interviewer: Which of your index inclusion requirements do you think would be the most challenging for student journals to meet?

DOAJ: If journals have got good support from their institution's library, and are following best practice in their editorial processes, then they should be able to meet the basic criteria.

What we find is that licensing and copyright are often very difficult for people to understand who are new to open access publishing. That would not be exclusive to student-run journals – we see it everywhere - but their librarians should be able to help and advise.

Understanding what licensing means and that it's different to copyright is really important. And understanding what it is that works best for the journal. For instance, we have conversations with publishers sometimes, and they say: "We've got a CC BY license, but we don't want people to use the work commercially." That means they're using the wrong license!

So, it's understanding when you start: are you comfortable with other people using that work commercially or not? What the students would be comfortable with, what the organization is comfortable with in terms of the rights that you're giving to end-users. And not just end-users, but commercial organizations – under a CC BY license anyone may use the content commercially, without needing to inform you. This is a key issue for anyone who's starting out in open access – and definitely not specifically for student journals.

Interviewer: Would you like to see more student journals included in DOAJ?

DOAJ: Absolutely! Student journals are a great idea. They are introducing students to a lot of important concepts quite early in their academic career: what open access means, how to navigate the publishing world, being an author, being a reviewer, being an editor. There are so many positives to having a student journal from the point of view of the students themselves, but also for the institution and ultimately for the academic world as a whole, because people will be better at doing this the earlier they start. So, I'd love to have more student journals in DOAJ.

Interviewer: That's wonderful! So, what would a successful student journal application look like?

DOAJ: Obviously, it would meet the basic criteria. We would see all the information that we would expect on the journal website. The editorial board ideally would have some people from other institutions as well. One of the things that we encourage institutional journals to do is to make sure that they include people from other organizations on the board in order to have different viewpoints and experiences.

A successful application might have a few small queries from our reviewer, but this is normal. Often, we need to ask for more information to be provided, for instance about the peer review process or author fees (often journals with no fees don't mention this) or to include affiliations for the editorial board members, and of course qualifications for the advisors on a student journal!

But ideally if we get a student journal, and it's on a standard platform like OJS or Janeway, we'd probably expect to see most of the information we need there, and if we only have a few small queries, then that would be pretty good.

Interviewer: That sounds great! Would you have any final thoughts on student journals and indexing or any advice for student journal publishers?

DOAJ: How can we encourage more student journals to apply, to realize that it's a good thing to be indexed, in terms of visibility? Getting a journal indexed is the first step, but sharing their article metadata is also really important. If the article metadata is supplied to indexing services like DOAJ, then that data gets pushed out to a lot of other services and the opportunity for people to find that content is really increased. So, I see DOAJ as a useful starting point for open access student journals to increase their reach and demonstrate the quality of their content to the whole research community.

Interviewer: Thank you for the interview!

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