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Beyond Publication: Building Our Scholarly Community

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I have been thinking about a question that often comes up when we discuss building and sustaining a university journal: Why do we need our own journal when our researchers can publish in established journals, particularly those indexed in Scopus and other reputable databases?

It is a fair question, and one we should ask before investing institutional time, funding, and expertise in a journal. My answer is not that a university needs its own journal to prove that it is a scholarly institution. A university can be productive in research without publishing a journal of its own. Its faculty can publish in excellent journals, collaborate internationally, generate new knowledge, and contribute meaningfully to their fields.

Having a university journal, therefore, is not a measure of scholarly maturity. The more useful question is what a responsibly managed journal can contribute to the research culture of its institution and the wider academic community.

Scholarship goes beyond producing research

A university should not only teach what is already known. It should also be a place where knowledge is created, questioned, communicated, and shared. This is consistent with the Philippine Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) quality-assurance framework, which associates university status with viable research programs that produce new knowledge, evidenced by refereed publications, citations, inventions, patents, and other scholarly outputs.[1]

Research, however, is only part of the scholarly enterprise. We conduct experiments, gather and analyze data, interpret results, and write manuscripts. The work continues when someone evaluates the manuscript, reviews it, edits it, and determines whether it is ready for publication. Editors must assess whether a submission fits the journal's scope, identify reviewers with relevant expertise, evaluate their comments, and determine whether revisions have adequately addressed the concerns raised. These decisions are not always straightforward. They require subject knowledge, consistency, and a commitment to scholarly standards.

This less visible work is also part of scholarship. A journal provides an opportunity for members of the academic community to participate not only as authors, but also as reviewers, editors, and readers. It helps develop the people and practices that sustain scholarly communication.

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Our journal and established journals serve complementary purposes

I do not see building an institutional journal as an alternative to publishing in established journals. I want our researchers to publish their best work in reputable national and international journals. If a study is best suited for an established Scopus-indexed journal, then that is where it should go. An institutional journal should not exist simply to keep research within our own walls.

At the same time, a journal can provide opportunities that individual publications alone cannot. Younger researchers can gain experience in preparing manuscripts, responding to reviewers, and revising their work. Faculty members can develop as reviewers and editors. Students can begin to see research not only as a requirement for graduation, but as part of a larger scholarly conversation.

We have seen how publication through a local journal can support graduate researchers. A study developed through collaboration between a graduate student and a co-author may meet a degree requirement, but its value need not end there. Once published, the work becomes accessible to other researchers and may be cited in subsequent studies. In this way, publication can contribute both to a student's academic progression

[1]Commission on Higher Education (CHED). CHED Memorandum Order No. 46, s. 2012: Policy-Standard to Enhance Quality Assurance (QA) in Philippine Higher Education through an Outcomes-Based and Typology-Based QA.

and to the wider exchange of knowledge.

This is not to suggest that an institutional journal is the only way graduate students can achieve these outcomes. Rather, it illustrates how a well-managed journal can provide a meaningful publishing opportunity while helping local research reach a wider audience.

A Philippine dimension

This role is particularly relevant in the Philippine context. We produce research that speaks directly to our communities, environment, agriculture, health, industries, education, and other concerns important to the country. Much of this work belongs in international journals, and it should be published there when appropriate. But not every valuable Philippine research question will fit the priorities, scope, or readership of a highly specialized journal. That does not make the research less valuable.

An institutional journal can begin by serving its own academic community, but it should not remain inward-looking. If developed properly, it can welcome contributions from researchers in other institutions and make locally relevant research accessible to readers beyond the university.

For JEEAR, this responsibility is particularly meaningful. Engineering, environmental sciences, life sciences, and agriculture intersect with questions of food, health, natural resources, environmental change, technology, infrastructure, livelihoods, and sustainable development. A multidisciplinary journal can provide a common space for researchers working in these areas to encounter one another's work and bring findings grounded in Mindanao and Philippine realities into wider discussions.

> **"The value of research does not end with publication."**

The value of research does not end with publication. Findings need to circulate among researchers, practitioners, students, policymakers, and communities that may use them or build upon them.

The responsibility of establishing a journal

There is, of course, a concern that encouraging universities to establish journals may contribute to the proliferation of predatory or poor-quality publications. This concern deserves serious attention. Journals that accept manuscripts without meaningful scrutiny, lack transparent editorial processes, or prioritize publication volume over scholarly merit undermine trust in academic publishing.

Establishing a journal creates responsibilities. It requires clear and publicly available policies, an active and credible editorial board, appropriate review processes, transparent handling of conflicts of interest, screening for plagiarism and other forms of misconduct, and editorial decisions based on scholarly merit. Journals must also be honest about their processes. If a particular article type undergoes editorial assessment rather than external peer review, that distinction should be clear to authors and readers.

Institutional support is essential. Universities need to provide the time, expertise, editorial independence, and infrastructure required to maintain quality. A journal should not be pressured to accept papers to meet publication targets or treated as a convenient outlet for work that has not met the standards of other scholarly venues.

The challenge is not to produce more journals at any cost. It is to develop journals that deserve the confidence of authors, reviewers, readers, and the wider academic community.

Quality must come before indexing

Simply having a journal does not mean that we have built a good one. Nor should indexing be treated as the final measure of its quality. Indexing should be a consequence of sound publishing practices, not the sole reason for establishing a journal. Scopus evaluates journals across areas that include journal policy, content, standing, publishing regularity, and online availability. Its criteria also consider peer review, editorial and author representation, academic contribution, publication ethics, and the accessibility of the journal website.[2] These provide useful points for examining our own practices, whether or not a journal is currently indexed.

A serious journal must maintain clear policies, appropriate review processes, consistent publication, transparent editorial decisions, and mechanisms that protect the integrity of the scholarly record. Its articles should also be discoverable and accessible to those who may need them. These are not merely requirements for entering an indexing database. They are the foundations of responsible scholarly publishing.

What are we building?

The opportunity is to build scholarly capacity. Publishing in established journals allows our researchers to participate in scholarly communities that already exist. Developing our own journal gives us an opportunity to strengthen the people and practices that support scholarly communication within our academic community. These purposes are complementary.

A university's scholarly maturity is better understood through the quality, integrity,

[2]Elsevier. Scopus Content Policy and Selection. https://www.elsevier.com/products/scopus/content/content-policy-and-selection

relevance, and influence of the knowledge its people produce and share. A journal can support that maturity, but it cannot define it on its own.

The question, then, is not whether every university must have its own journal. It is whether we are prepared or willing to build and sustain one responsibly, and whether doing so contributes meaningfully to the research community we want to develop.

That is the kind of scholarly community I hope JEEAR can continue to help build.