

Developing the Caribbean Scholarly Text: Journal Publishing at the University of the West Indies

Annie Paul

The journals published within the University were founded and maintained mainly to communicate results of research and reflection and views and opinions of relevance to the Caribbean. Some of them by their nomenclature itself indicate this characteristic; e.g. Caribbean Quarterly, Caribbean Geography, West Indian Medical Journal, Caribbean Journal of Education, Journal of West Indian Literature and Caribbean Journal of History. Social and Economic Studies is unique in not announcing any Caribbean-centric bias or focus in its title.

In the past few years UWI journal editors have tried various methods of increasing visibility and access to their output. In 2004 I convened several meetings of journal editors at UWI to discuss the vast technological changes that faced us and to decide on a common strategy that would allow us to pre-empt any plans the University might have for reducing the number of journals on campus. The late Samuel Bandara, acquisitions librarian of many years standing at UWI, Mona, was instrumental in advocating that UWI journals go the Open Access route. What I am going to read below is based on his notes about the nature and characteristics of UWI journals, the problems they faced and the solutions he was recommending.

There are basically two kinds of UWI journals—directly funded journals such as CQ, SES and WIMJ and other journals such as Caribbean Geography and Caribbean Journal of Earth Sciences which are published within the University with a very clear involvement of university resources but which are not funded out of the U's budget line. Bandara also drew the meeting's attention to a third type of publication consisting of annuals and occasional papers which strictly speaking could be considered to be periodicals or serial publications utilizing an ISSN rather than an ISBN.

UWI journals, according to Bandara, share certain characteristics. They are all print journals, some with a plan for an electronic version with the first steps taken (WIMJ eg.) and others with a web presence such as CG which has a website with an index for instance or the Caribbean Journal of Engg. Despite WIMJ's electronic presence however search engines such as Google do not pick it up which raises questions about the kind of network that is utilized to go electronic. In the case of WIMJ this is BIREME, a South American programme.

Currently there is no official listing of journals on the UWI website and not all current titles are known within the university. Subscription lists are very small due to high printing and mailing costs and lack of support within the region. Most publishing units on campus have no specific marketing and distribution arm to promote the journal and build its subscription base.

Further problems facing UWI journals are circular in nature. Because these are print journals editors have to wait for a quorum of articles before releasing an issue. Especially in the case of peer reviewed journals such as SES it can take an inordinately long time for enough articles to successfully make it through the review process in time for publication. Delays in publishing

and low circulation in turn discourage good contributors making it difficult to ensure a consistently high quality in content.

At the same time UWI journals have been instrumental in making regional research available and articles published in them are used as teaching and learning resources. Electronic publishing offers various possibilities to circumvent the difficulties inherent in the production of print journals. Once journals are available electronically, printing and mailing costs can either be reduced or done away with altogether. Issues can be brought out in a speedier time frame and reaching readers electronically is far easier and quicker. Hyperlinking to other websites provides new ways of being accessed.

New models of publishing and communicating offer new solutions such as the open access model, institutional depositories such as D-Space and single document delivery systems, author payment model etc. It remains for UWI to make informed decisions on which of these models to pursue.

Visibility of UWI journals is poor because we are not listed in major databases and subscription bases are low. UWI itself does not list its journals on its website. One way to increase visibility is to go the open access route. It was decided to approach the University with a joint proposal recommending an electronic platform for all UWI journals which could be based on the SCIELO model which the WIMJ was already using.

Another librarian provided details of what the Scielo model would entail.

SCIELO stands for Scientific Electronic Library Online, a programme created to support the Virtual Health Library designed for Latin America and the Caribbean. SCIELO was created to increase the collaboration between information producers, intermediaries and processors for the facilitation of scientific communication, to take advantage of new technologies and in response to the low-impact factor of local journals, to increase visibility and access to them.

According to Mrs. Bandara citation indexes are not the only method of measuring impact factor of journals. Regional journals were set up to publish issues of import to the region, hence local journals carry material of topical significance, eg on ackee poisoning, which may not be of interest to others outside. They circulate within the region and measuring their impact is difficult. If such journals were online their impact factor would immediately go up.

Also as Mrs. Bandara pointed out, we have a serious problem recognizing our own journals as internationally credible academic journals and peer review journals. So for instance, the university does not recognize WIMJ and publication in it as a merit point when considering assessment and promotion of its staff. Instead it insists on considering only publication in so-called international journals as worthy of merit which ironically ends up devaluing the very journals that UWI is investing time and resources in. The net effect is that anyone who can publish in an international journal is not going to publish in local ones leaving local journals deprived of good, competitive scholarship. This is a bit of a vicious cycle and even publishing our journals electronically won't help unless the university reviews these policies towards its journals.

Mrs. Bandara stressed that university academics involved in making decisions about electronic publishing should be well-informed about what this entails as merely putting the journals contents online is not enough. It is necessary to have proper indexes and search tools to make the material accessible.

Going back to the SCIELO model and the technical assistance available Mrs. Bandara said that appropriate software was provided free to the countries falling under the BIREME network and the Caribbean does fall into this category. SCIELO would provide a copy of the software to countries where a centre would identify journals that meet its criteria. SCIELO would not accept any or all journals published in the country but is only interested in peer reviewed journals that meet certain technical standards.

UWI was chosen to be the national centre for the SCIELO network in Jamaica. BIREME provided training, perhaps a little prematurely, but more could be requested. Lack of system support is an issue as well, as the platform BIREME uses is a complex one utilizing LINUX. This was originally developed in Cuba because when that country underwent economic hardships instead of closing down their journals because of lack of paper and other resources the Cubans developed an electronic format for their journals and continued to publish instead of folding. In fact they set the trend of making scientific information available to anyone free of charge exposing their researchers to the rest of the world. This was taken over by BIREME eventually who fine tuned the program.

Problems

Mrs. Bandara said that she first approached WIMJ with a proposal to put it online in 1999 but it was 2001 before she could come to an agreement with the editor-in-chief at the time. Fortunately she was on sabbatical leave that year and able to devote herself to the task something she would hve been unable to do if she were at work as it was an extremely time-consuming process. A serious problem was that the personnel to be trained to process the journal and upload it were not technologically savvy.

Another problem she noticed was that people in charge of journals, editorial boards and so on, were not clear on the purpose of the journal. Thus they would put a lot of emphasis on the small amount being earned by the journal instead of viewing it as a vehicle for disseminating research produced by the university.

Advantages

According to Mrs. Bandara it is part of the university's strategic plan that UWI's information resources be made available to the wider community. Journals are part of this. With the new emphasis on 'impact factor' as a tool to assess performance of academics online journals become increasingly important. There are two things that have to happen to increase the impact factor of UWI journals. One, they have to be easily accessible preferably on an open access platform. Two, we may have to create our own citation index. It is crucial that the university management be convinced of the importance of electronic publishing otherwise the recognition for the research that we as Caribbean people are supposed to do, topical research, would not be recognized and we will not get much credit for it. Having it available on the internet even if it is

not internationally appreciable content is useful. We had a request about a year or so ago from a doctor for information on injuries caused by a coconut falling on the head. We looked in a medical database and found that there was an article on the subject in a Philipino journal. And because the journal was open access we could get the article immediately for the doctor and it may have saved somebody's life!

The question then is how we account for and measure such uses of the internet. Electronic can be organized to allows us to see exactly how many people are accessing our articles, either by downloading or merely opening the items.

Another advantage the WIMJ has is that the frequency of issues can be improved. From this year six issues will be available instead of four. Electronic publishing also allows for greater transparency. For instance the peer reviews of articles can be made available to readers. Articles can also be linked to other articles by the same researcher and other related internet resources. Searching of databases is also possible.

In addition to arguing for electronic delivery of journal articles journal editors also recommended that the University go in for what was termed a "common services platform." The argument went as follows:

The cost to UWI of providing a modern central facility with adequate capacity by way of hardware, software and operating expertise to mount a series of scholarly journals for distribution electronically and in print would be far more economical than the current situation. An examination of the current expenditure incurred by the University on its three Campuses in the present day journal publication programme should be undertaken with a view to identifying the declared and hidden costs of producing the journals, their storage and distribution. For comparison with these costs, estimates should be made of the projected costs to establish and maintain a central facility on one of the three Campuses to mount and maintain the issues of these journals in electronic and print format.

Such a facility would centralize and streamline procedures such as **the acceptance and peer review process of articles submitted, copy editing, the formatting and typesetting of copy, proofreading and printing or production of electronic files.** With all journals under one roof, **common minimum publication standards can be easily monitored and maintained** so that all UWI journals measure up in terms of both substantive content and production values.

In addition a central facility would allow for one suitably qualified person to **manage the distribution and marketing of all UWI journals thereby elevating their visibility and accessibility** as well as boosting revenue from the same.

A common platform would also enable us to obtain **more preferential printing rates from a chosen printer** who could be contracted to handle all the university's journals. Some journals with extremely small print runs may want to consider going completely electronic which would obviate punitive printing costs thus resulting in significant savings to the university.

The common services platform need not include a printery but would benefit from **an in-house desktop publishing facility** which would service all the journals.

As editor of the journal *Social and Economic Studies* the following are some of the actions that I have taken as well as some of the recommendations being made. While SES may have been conceived initially as a forum for disseminating research done at the Institute and later the Faculty of Social Sciences, it was also viewed as an international journal, rather than an in-house or local one, as indicated by its title SES, which clearly signalled a mandate unrestricted by any qualifier that would have located it exclusively as a Caribbean or West Indian periodical. This was in contrast to the other two major University of the West Indies journals, Caribbean Quarterly and West Indian Medical Journal respectively.

Over the years, despite the wide ambit suggested by its title, SES became, especially in the 80s and 90s, an outlet for the very productive economists and econometricians of the region. Under Professor Duncan's academic editorship we sought to correct this by attempting to restore, to the extent that we could, the 'social' in Social and Economic Studies. While great progress was made on this front, at the end of another decade it is clear that the journal is sorely in need of revitalization, if not a complete overhaul and redirection. As advanced as SES was for its time, with a focus that traversed several disciplines, it is still very much a discipline-bound journal in a time when disciplinary walls have either crumbled or been discarded.

Digitization and electronic availability of journal

Decisions have to be made about the priorities of the journal. In the last few years increasing the visibility of the journal was uppermost in our minds and with a view to this I signed contracts with ProQuest and EBSCO, two major international databases which carry the journal full text online. SES is also in the Elsevier database **Scopus** ("the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature and quality web sources with smart tools to track, analyze and visualize research").

In early September I held a meeting with a member of UWI's legal unit to discuss potential contracts with JStor and Gale, both companies which are interested in digitizing the vast SES archives dating back to 1953. This would not only make earlier issues of SES widely available online, some of which are out of print, it would also enable us to undertake individual document delivery.

Over the past year we have been making pdfs of our articles available to the Brazilian network, Scielo with a view to going online with them. It should be noted that if and when this happens the journal will be freely available online as Scielo is an Open Access network.

This is where certain crucial policy decisions will need to be made regarding our objectives as publishers of an academic journal. Are we a profit-seeking enterprise or are we going to be part of the Open Access movement which is increasingly gaining hold in the academic world? Only last week the news broke that five Ivy League institutions including Harvard and MIT are making their journals freely available online.

Electronic Submission Process

While SES now receives most of its submissions electronically, we have no well-designed system of manuscript management in place using these new methods. There are now a number of software programs available which would really streamline and enhance the peer review process. One such is Manuscript Central, an **Online Peer Review System** that integrates article solicitation, manuscript submission, submission fee collection, author file conversion, correspondence, tracking, reviewer selection, review completion, decision making, reporting, issue planning, user data management, broadcast e-mail, XML metadata transformation, and post-acceptance integration with print and online production...all in one easy-to-use system.

Submission Fee

This is something I have always suggested that SES should institute, a fee to cover the costs of getting articles reviewed in a timely fashion. Many international journals charge such fees which in turn allow them to employ the kind of staff necessary to expedite the review process and general production of the journal. The model I have suggested would require each contributor/submitter to take out a one-year subscription to SES.

Marketing and Distribution of Journal

It may suit us to explore journal bundling arrangements with other journals with common goals and challenges whether these be geographical or ethnic. Eg. We might consider entering into an agreement with the Journal of Black Political Economy and the African Development Review to offer subscribers all three journals at one price. Similarly the possibility of bundling Caribbean journals, UWI journals and even Ibero-American journals exists.