



## **The Evolution of a Refereed Journal:**

### ***The International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship***

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#### **Abstract**

The majority of students, both undergraduate and graduate, at post-secondary institutions find themselves having to write academic papers. They often ask what happens to the paper? Who reads it except for the marker, usually a faculty member? We hear that the paper gets filed in the “round bin”, never to be read again. Sometimes the faculty member might suggest publication, but students are often unsure of how or where to begin the publishing process, and perhaps do feel comfortable asking for advice from faculty members or fellow students. Several academic faculty members addressed these concerns by developing a journal designed to support students to move their course papers from ‘a who reads it approach to publishing’. The authors describe the evolution of *The International Journal of Nursing of Nursing Student Scholarship*.

Keywords: Nursing Students; Scholarly publications; Refereed or Peer-Reviewed Journals

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The Evolution of a Refereed Journal:  
*The International Journal of Nursing of Nursing Student Scholarship*

As editors of the *International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship* (IJNSS), Hirst and Le Navenec are committed to helping students learn about and engage in the publishing process. Our journal is intended for novice student authors at both the undergraduate and graduate levels of their education. We encourage students to publish in conjunction with the professor(s) responsible for marking their course work and research projects that form the basis of their manuscripts. Faculty evaluations and institutional accreditation processes, conducted by both internal and external reviewers, examine “measurable indicators,” including student and student/faculty publications, during their reviews (Wolff, 2013). Consequently, faculty / student collaborations can be valuable for the student but can also enhance the reputation of the faculty.

### **Background**

As nursing faculty members, we often suggest to our undergraduate and graduate students that they turn their course papers and projects into manuscripts for publication in a refereed (peer reviewed) journal. We want students to disseminate their academic work and launch a career of nursing scholarship that includes publishing. However, students often have trouble achieving these goals because of a lack of confidence, time, or desire to publish, or the inability to meet the competing demands and priorities of study, work, and family life (Cleary & Walter, 2004), and as Shellenbarger, Gazza, and Hunker (2018) identified inadequate writing skills and little (if any) instruction regarding the publishing process. Another reason is a lack of student know-how to get started on transforming an assignment into a manuscript of acceptable quality for submission to a peer-reviewed journal (Rew, 2012).

Writing scholarly papers for publication is not a skill that is often formally taught to nursing students. Instead, nurse educators set assessment assignments and students focus their efforts towards successfully completing the requirements of the course. Few students consider the possibility of publishing their assignments. Yet the dissemination of knowledge is a hallmark of the nursing profession. It is important that the voice of all nurses, including students, is heard within the health care, academic, and nursing policy environments. The paper describes faculty involvement in the development of a refereed journal for students. It summarizes the benefits for students of publishing and provides strategies for faculty members to facilitate student publishing.

### **Building a Journal**

The *International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship* originated as a result of Dr. LeNavenec’s search for a refereed journal where nursing students, both undergraduate and graduate, could publish the papers that they had completed as part of an online post-RN credit course at the University of XXX, Faculty of Nursing. This search led to the discovery of a

journal entitled *Journal of Undergraduate Nursing Scholarship* (<http://www.juns.nursing.arizona.edu/default.htm>). The journal was established in 1999 under the editorship of Dr. Judith Effken and Dr. Judy Ayoub, both with the Faculty of Nursing, University of Arizona at Tucson, Arizona, United States (<http://www.juns.nursing.arizona.edu/articles/Fall%201999/editorial1.htm>).

Due to the death of Dr. Ayoub and other changes occurring at their university, Dr. Effken agreed to accept the offer of Drs. LeNavenec, Hirst, and Aldiabat, from the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Calgary, to redesign the journal so that its scope could be international. It was anticipated that this would potentially increase the number of undergraduate and graduate submissions and promote global interactions for nursing students. The new editors knew that it would be a challenge to assume their new roles, but they accepted it. They are committed to supporting students during the entire publishing process, from initial manuscript submission, through the peer review, revision, and final proof-reading processes. Manuscripts cannot be submitted until after a paper has been graded and course work completed to ensure that the integrity of academic practices are maintained.

Prior to opening the Journal for submissions, we applied for an ISSN. We contacted ISSN Canada at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/isn/041011-2000-e.html> and provided the following information: name of the journal, place of publication, name of the publisher, and frequency of the serial publication. We made the decision to have only a volume number for each year and article number instead of an issue number. Our reason being that each article is immediately published once the review process and required editorial changes have been completed. As editors, we also had to ensure that the online submission process and instructions for student authors were adequate and comprehensive. The content we included on the server about our Journal was guided by the categories provided by the Open Journal Publishing system, which uses software developed, supported, and freely distributed by the Public Knowledge Project. This project is under the GNU General Public License. At the University of Calgary, all editors of refereed journals belong to the newly established Journal Publishing Community of Practice (<https://library.ucalgary.ca/c.php?g=664653&p=4673373>). The COP provides a range of support in setting up a refereed journal on the server.

The main tasks of the journal editors are to screen incoming papers for quality and assign them to reviewers, who are often nursing faculty members, to develop strategies to ensure there is an effective editorial team, and to invite academic colleagues from a range of disciplines and international settings to serve as reviewers. We ask our reviewers to take an active role and help to mentor the student authors as appropriate. Several have accepted this role with enjoyment.

### **Benefits of Publishing**

For students, the benefits of publishing a paper include bolstering their confidence and knowledge, showing them how they can contribute to the nursing profession (Bowen, 2018), and supporting admission to graduate school for those who are considering this path. For graduate students, it supports possible funding applications and for some it helps them transition into

academic careers (Bartkowski, Deem, & Ellison, 2015; June, 2012). There is also the excitement experienced by individuals when they see their name in print.

Mentors also benefit from collaborative faculty / student writing. There is value in harnessing the diverse perspectives that students often have to their nursing practice. Working with a student may advance the collective understanding of a topic and contribute to the scholarly agenda of the faculty member.

### **The Challenges**

Kennedy, Newland, and Owens, (2017) described the findings from the INANE<sup>1</sup> survey on student papers submitted to nursing journals. The six themes that emerged from the qualitative data were: submissions fail to follow author guidelines, characteristics of student submissions, lack of professional behaviour from students, lack of professional behaviour from faculty, editor responses to student submissions, and faculty as mentors. We would like to address several of these themes.

For students, the challenges are diverse. For some students, the level of ‘topic saturation’ may be such that the student feels unable to write any more than the minimum requirements of the course. Addressing such challenges may include taking a cooling off period or finding a fresh approach to a topic that, for the student, may feel overdone. Other students may feel that there is no reason for them to write. Publishing is not always a priority for them. For example, the assignments that they write are primarily a means to an end: specifically, the nursing degree they are seeking.

Consequently for faculty, motivating students to concentrate on writing for publication may be difficult. In addition, challenges are presented by the nature of assessment tasks, which produce assignments that may not be easily transformed into a publication (Rew, 2012). Yet, academic writing plays a critical role in socializing students into the discourse of nursing in educational institutions. While McKinley (2015) made the argument that there is a need to situate student academic writing as a socially constructed piece of writing that embody a writer’s cultural identity and critical argument. Facilitating writer self-awareness provides students with an enhanced understanding of the writing process, tools with which to write assignments, and greater confidence to move through the numerous literacy tasks of the academy institution and into their professional careers. Inviting students to examine their beliefs about writing and writer identity, may be beneficial activities. We would also suggest that it builds respect, skills, familiarity with the editing process, and critical construction of arguments.

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### **Taking the First Steps with Students**

Before steps are taken to provide the necessary mentoring support to students to write for publication, faculty should consider their motivation for involving themselves in such activities. Questions to be asked include:

- Is it fair to expect students to publish papers if faculty are not publishing papers from their own academic work?
- Who will benefit most from the publication?
- Who will be the first, second, and subsequent authors of the publication?
- What support is available from university services such as an effective writing centre, library or teaching/learning centre?

Authorship must be appropriately attributed and all authors must qualify for authorship – it is unacceptable for faculty to accept honorary authorship or attribute students' ideas to themselves (Cleary, Jackson, Walter, Watson, & Hunt, 2012). It is suggested that these issues be discussed at the outset with the students involved to ensure the process is clear, transparent, and that it complies with accepted ethics and publishing standards. This particularly needs to be balanced with the ethical principle of non-coercion, so a student does not believe that agreement for authorship or even participation is related to the grade for the course. It is also important that the student drives the topic and their area of interest within the parameters outlined by the course content.

There is a need to set assessment activities that produce papers that can be readily adapted and complex enough to contribute fresh knowledge to the literature. This aspect is noteworthy because one basic criterion for publication in the scholarly literature is the requirement that a manuscript contributes a new perspective on a topic. Journal editors and reviewers do not want to receive a manuscript that does not meet such basic criteria for publication. Such assignments could include case studies, philosophical discussions, opinion pieces, letters to the editors, and literature reviews, in addition to data driven papers (Rew, 2012). When written assessment tasks have not been used, the challenge is to create a “spin” for the paper to enable consideration for publication (Rew, 2012). Of course, this is a requirement for all journal articles, and so faculty can use the opportunity to support students through the process of writing at a greater depth of knowledge and understanding. Huisman, Saab, van Driel, and van den Broek's (2018) compared the writing performance of undergraduate students ( $N = 83$ ) who either provided or received anonymous written peer feedback in the context of an academic writing task. They also investigated whether students' peer feedback perceptions were related to the nature of the peer feedback they received and to writing performance. Their findings demonstrated that both giving and receiving feedback contributed to improvements in writing performance.

### **Mentoring Strategies to Help Students**

There are strategies that can be employed to help students transform a quality assignment to a standard that is publishable as an article. Achieving this outcome can require some

innovative thinking. For example, while strategies to support the writing of academics is common in most universities, less often does one see workshops for students on how to convert an assignment to a publishable paper. An initial step is to consult the 'Guidelines for Authors' of the *International Journal of Undergraduate Nursing Scholarship*. Subsequent to this, the following questions provide a first step to help both academic mentors and students alike the process of revising assignments for publication:

- Is the topic interesting, important, or a phenomenon of concern to the discipline?
- Is there a clearly stated purpose and thesis statement?
- Is the introduction compelling?
- Are the terms used clearly defined and logical?
- Is there a logical flow of ideas that reflect the purpose /aim? (Rew, 2012, p. 273).

There is usually a need to consider and, if appropriate, incorporate the feedback received on the assignment through the assessment process. The process of transforming an assignment into a manuscript for submission to a journal should commence only after the assignment has been graded. This aspect is to avoid the potential for prejudicial grading if faculty are included on the author team prior to marking (Fowler & Davis, 2013). Feedback provided through the assessment process may well provide guidance on how to improve the manuscript and identify any missing content.

Time must be spent on refining the manuscript. Many new authors often under-estimate the amount of time it can take to polish a manuscript to a publishable standard. We suggest that faculty mentors work closely with their students during this stage, and upon receiving feedback from the reviewers, so they do not feel disheartened. This aspect includes assuring the student that there is a great deal of satisfaction in working on a piece of writing until publication is achieved.

It has been our experience that students have the potential and desire to engage in scholarly publications. However, they may need suggestions on support systems available from the writing center at their educational setting. In our case, the Effective Writing Centre at the University of Calgary was extremely helpful in this regard. They set up a credit course on scholarly writing, and held short review sessions with interested students. During those sessions, staff discussed a range of topics with the students, such as: (a) how to enhance the scholarly tone of the paper by use of clear, and precise sentences, illustrative examples, and effective paraphrasing techniques; and (b) by broadening their literature search thorough use of such resources as iSEEK, RefSeek, Digital Library of the Commons Repository, and Academic Index.

Kent and colleagues (2017) described their decision to foster a 'community of practice' with the goal of improving confidence and productivity around academic writing. The usefulness of writing groups is well documented in the literature. When writing as part of a community, people are likely to learn faster about the conventions and challenges of writing, to support each other at times of blockage, and to demystify the process of writing by sharing each other's successes and defeats (Flowerdew & Wang, 2018; More, 2003). The creation of a group of students interested in writing for publication may be such a community.

## Future Directions

We have plans for the journal. In our own academic experiences, we find that very few students and a decreasing number of faculty colleagues actually visit a library building. The implication is that as editors we need to ensure that our journal site is easily accessible, informative, and addresses the needs of novice student authors. As more and more online content is being generated, the role of the volunteer editors is increasingly demanding. To enhance our Journal's volume and speed of publication of manuscripts, our future plans include seeking funds from donors to provide an honorarium for part-time services provided by a Journal Manager, Copy Editor, and Layout Editor. Recognizing that English is but one of the numerous languages spoken nationally and internationally, we are talking about including articles written in French. As editors, we are open to the diversity of our country, if we can locate qualified reviewers who speak the language used by the author.

## Conclusion

Although our refereed journal has been in place since 2014, and hence relatively 'young', we continue to receive several submissions each month. We invite the readers of this article to encourage their students to submit an article to our journal: see Appendix 1: the Call for Papers, which provides a concise outline of the requirements for submission. This information can also be located on our website: <https://ijnss.journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ijnss>.

We want to acknowledge that actually getting words on the page is difficult. However, the benefits for students are evident. In summary, students are well positioned to develop the requisite skill set to write for publication especially if supported by faculty mentors.

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## Appendix 1



### CALL FOR PAPERS

The International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship (IJNSS) was created to provide the opportunity for undergraduate and graduate nursing students to publish their scholarly papers that have been completed as course assignments.

Submissions will also be accepted from students in related health disciplines if they have completed coursework that is applicable to the discipline and profession of nursing in particular or to health and human services in general. The aim is to facilitate interprofessional/collaborative learning, foster an interest in research and its dissemination, and promote innovations in healthcare practice.

Please invite your course professor, faculty advisor, or thesis supervisor to be a joint author with you.

As an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal, IJNSS invites scholarly papers that have not been previously published pertaining to multinational, transcultural, and/or global aspects of nursing care in the context of both health and illness. Please use the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA, 6<sup>th</sup>ed.) and limit length to no more than 22 double-spaced pages. Articles will be published as soon as they have been reviewed and accepted. Book Reviews, and/or reviews of AV material, which will not be refereed, are also welcome.

### Why Publish in the International Journal of Nursing Student Scholarship (IJNSS)?

1. **Open Access:**  
This English language journal is accessible online for free and thus can reach readers worldwide. There is no fee required by an author to publish and no fee required by readers to access.
2. **Full Peer Review:**  
All manuscripts submitted to our journal that meets the specified requirements undergo double-blinded peer review from international faculty members.
3. **Fast Publication:**  
Peer review process and publication may be completed within 8 to 10 weeks.