

The Importance of a Peer-Reviewed Journal

Earl F. Burkholder, PS, PE, F.ASCE

Global COGO, Inc. – Las Cruces, NM 88003

Email: eburk@globalcogo.com URL: www.globalcogo.com

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The purpose of this article is to solicit support for the peer-reviewed journal, “Surveying and Land Information Science” (SaLIS). It was reported previously that the National Society of Professional Surveyors (NSPS) will discontinue publication of SaLIS. A letter signed jointly by the Presidents of the American Association of Geodetic Surveying (AAGS) and the Geographic and Land Information Society (GLIS) in January 2014 confirms that AAGS and GLIS (former member organizations of ACSM along with NSPS) are now sole owners of SaLIS. Admittedly, in the re-organization of NSPS, hard decisions had to be made. But, due to the importance of a peer-reviewed journal to the surveying profession, I believe that we (New Mexico Surveyors and others) should find a way to continue supporting SaLIS.

Published literature is one of the hallmarks of a profession. Credibility of the publishing process is established by adherence to high publication standards including grammar, process, and content. It is appropriate for a professional society to oversee and be responsible for a (surveying) journal. Peer-reviewed journals are the “norm” within most learned professions.

The following is shared from my perspective of serving as Editor of the ASCE Journal of Surveying Engineering from 1985 to 1989 and again from 1992 to 1996. It was a huge task and an enormous responsibility. I could not have done it on my own. But, I was part of a well-established publishing process and I enjoyed the generous support of many authors, reviewers, and society staff.

Characteristics of a peer-reviewed journal include:

- A professional society is responsible for administrative details involving the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), the Digital Object Identifier (DOI) for each issue published, and intellectual property issues.
- The professional society is also responsible for managing the logistical and financial affairs of the publication, the publication schedule, printing/advertising mailing etc., and establishing guidelines for authors with regard to length, format, and, to a certain extent, content.
- An Editor collects manuscripts from persons who voluntarily submit articles for review and possible publication. Neither the Editor nor the authors are paid for their efforts.
- The Editor establishes a network of reviewers (Editorial Board) having expertise in various areas – technical and otherwise. Reviewers are not paid.
- Upon receiving a qualifying manuscript, the Editor sends the manuscript to reviewers for evaluation – typically 2, 3, or 4 reviewers.
- Each reviewer studies the manuscript and formulates questions, comments, and recommendations with regard to publishing the manuscript. Options for each reviewer include, revise, decline, publish, or revise and re-review. Reviewing is often an iterative process.
- With sufficient positive reviews in hand, the Editor recommends the paper for publication by the professional society whose staff handles actual publication.

- Generally, the author never knows the identity of the reviewers. In some cases, the review is “double blind” which means the identity of the author is not disclosed to the reviewers.
- The cost of a subscription to the peer-reviewed publication is normally included in the society membership dues structure. Other non-members subscriptions (e.g. libraries) are revenue generators for the professional society.

Examples of peer-reviewed journals related to surveying include:

- Surveying and Land Information Science (SaLIS) formerly published by the American Congress on Surveying & Mapping (ACSM as representing NSPS, AAGS, and GLIS).
- Photogrammetric Engineering & Remote Sensing published by the American Society of Photogrammetry & Remote Sensing (ASPRS).
- Journal of Surveying Engineering published by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE).
- Survey Review published by the British Commonwealth Association of Surveying and Land Economy (CASLE).

Should trade magazines be considered to be an acceptable alternative to a peer-reviewed publication?

- Trade magazines are capitalistically motivated and advertiser supported. That in and of itself is not bad. But, should the reputation and stature of the surveying profession be represented by or dependent upon the trade magazines?
- A trade magazine Editor (paid) is responsible for soliciting articles and deciding what gets published. Some authors are paid. The function of an Editorial Board (if it exists) is often less formally defined. The point is that trade publications answer to commercial interests as opposed to academic (professional) criteria.
- Fortunately, the surveying profession currently enjoys the benefits of several (excellent) competing trade magazines, i.e.,
 - i.) P.O. B.
 - ii.) Professional Surveyor
 - iii.) American Surveyor
 - iv.) GIM International
 - v.) Others

Part of the dilemma is:

- Academic faculty need to demonstrate professional acumen by publishing in peer-reviewed publications – basis of the cliché, “publish or perish.”
- While trade magazine content may be good for practitioners and technicians, that content and authorship is no substitute for material published in a peer-reviewed journal.
- Citing or using material appearing in a trade magazine is certainly appropriate in some cases for “getting the job done” but the professional authority (credibility) of a trade magazine does not stack up to that of a peer-reviewed journal. Case law in our legal system provides an analogy..

Society newsletters such as the NMPS Benchmarks also have a valuable role to fill. A separate article will be devoted to discussing the benefits of a state society newsletter.