A JOURNAL OF ONE'S OWN

DEVELOPING AN INNOVATIVE, VALUES-DRIVEN OPEN JOURNAL

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INTRODUCTION

Open journal publishing, as well as the broader internet publishing phenomenon, has the potential to advance innovation in scholarly communication. The past decade has seen a flourishing of independent, open access journals, but too often these journals replicate traditional models of scholarly communication, perpetuating the inequities, bias, cronyism, abusive peer-review processes, and disciplinary silos that have corrupted the scholarly publication ecosystem.[1] Institutional and for-profit barriers to access to the scholarly record amplify these problems and exacerbate misperceptions of scholarly work.

In 2019, the Digital Frontiers community founded the online journal *Unbound: A Journal of Digital Scholarship*.[2] Digital Frontiers was established in 2012 as an inclusive community for digital scholarship practitioners in a range of disciplines.[3] Inspired by the recent work of Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Roopika Risam, and others, our vision of values-driven scholarly communication addresses the needs of underserved and marginalized communities within the disciplines by building publication models based on open access, transparent peer review, inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, community, mentorship, and an ethic of care. In what follows, we'll offer a snapshot of our intentions in establishing a values-driven open journal and look at ways these values can be incorporated into the bones of a journal—from its mission statement and editorial policies to its peer-review and submission guidelines. *Unbound* serves as an example of how core humanistic values and open practices might be integrated into a scholarly journal while maintaining a commitment to intellectual rigor, quality writing, editorial best practices, and publishing ethics.

VALUES

When we talk about values in this context, we're describing a shared set of social, professional, and intellectual priorities. The Digital Frontiers community has long practiced intentional inclusion—moving beyond merely advocating for diversity to organizing the community in a way that establishes clear policies and practices that deliver on the promise implied in that advocacy. We follow labor organizer Jane F. McAlevey in drawing a sharp line between advocacy, which tends to be top-down and focused on policy, and organizing, which builds

"the skills of organic leaders" for building and influencing communities and is most likely to result in systemic change.[4] In our experience, organizing is a process, not an event, and as individuals and a community we are continually learning and striving to bring our practice in line with our shared values.

When we talk of values, we aren't talking about morality, but at the same time, we are not *not* talking about morality. Citation politics are one example of this. Lauren Klein describes how he field of digital scholarship is reckoning with the legacy of a particular scholar who is one of the most prominent academic figures to be implicated in the #MeToo movement.[5] The decision whether to continue citing this individual or to seek alternative genealogies for digital scholarship is, we believe, a moral choice, and not merely academic. Ultimately we see decisions to respect students' and nonfaculty colleagues' labor and intellectual property rights, to make our work open, to implement inclusive practice that welcomes transgender people, to strive for racial and gender parity, and to support women, queer people, and people of color in our citations as choices between good and bad, right and wrong. Moral choices that are not merely trendy or expedient.

How, then, do we as individuals and as a community bring these values into focus in the context of scholarly communication?

IMPLEMENTATION

As we set out to establish *Unbound*, we considered what factors made the Digital Frontiers community attractive to its members. Over the years as the conference has evolved, we implemented transparent peer review for submissions, substantive documentation of our inclusion policy and code of conduct,[6] and provocative calls for proposals that explicitly addressed communities traditionally underserved by digital scholarship and that encode adherence to community standards for the use of the labor of students and nonfaculty collaborators as requirements for inclusion in the conference.[7] As an extension of this community, it was important to us that *Unbound* reflect these same practices.

In developing the journal, we chose an open source online platform, Open Journal Systems (OJS), hosted through the University of North Texas Libraries.[8] Library publishing offers an opportunity for innovation and self-direction that university or for-profit presses might not support and shares our mission of openness, access, diversity, and collaboration.[9] The UNT Libraries Scholarly Publishing Services likewise supports our goals of immediate public access, no fees to authors, compensation of student labor, and adherence to core principles of publication ethics.[10] The last includes transparent policies for submission, intellectual property, peer review, and data privacy.[11] In choosing to publish through a library and an open platform, we are embracing a shared goal of making scholarly communication available to a broader community without either the profit incentive or gatekeeping mentality that often accompanies academic publishing and its prestige economy.

Our values are also reinforced by the policies and practices that we have adopted for the journal. Principal among these is our transparent peer-review process, in which authors and reviewers know one another's names and engage in direct communication. This practice is intended to disrupt the bias and abuses that are endemic in traditional anonymous peer review and to move toward a practice of peer review grounded in a spirit of mentorship and an ethic of care. Ours is not the first journal to embrace such an approach. *The Public Philosophy Journal* at Michigan State University has elaborated a similar peer-review model that it calls "formative peer review."[12] In contrast to traditional peer review, which it feels "has become hostile to new ideas, composers, and audiences, and can even be traumatic for

those involved," it proposes a process of mutual engagement "rooted in trust and a shared commitment to improving the work through candid and collegial feedback." Rather than seeing peer review as a method of gatekeeping or disciplinary homogeneity, we envision it as a method of improving both the content and the experience of scholarly publishing for all those involved. By approaching peer review from a spirit of mentorship, we hope to inculcate these same values in students and early career scholars and librarians so they can bring this model to other journals and other scholarly communities.

Likewise, our submission policies, content categories, and CFPs are designed to reflect the demographic and disciplinary diversity of the Digital Frontiers community and to encourage the work of "scholars and professionals at all stages of professional development in all fields," including students, early career scholars, nonacademic professionals, and creative artists— voices often excluded from scholarly conversations or the academic rewards system.[13] The inclusion of digital scholarship reviews, notes on practice, and artist portfolios allow these contributors to engage with the broader scholarly community and render their intellectual and creative work legible as scholarship to new audiences.

CONCLUSION

Unbound is, and perhaps always will be, a work in progress. For a journal to be shaped by the values of the community it serves, change will be an ongoing and inevitable characteristic of its business and editorial models. The protean nature of digital communications will necessarily inform decisions about platforms, circulation, and media support, but those technical realities must be informed by the founding values of the publication and the community that sustains it. We anticipate that this will make for a less homogenous body of work than is expected from more traditional scholarly journals, but the heterogeneity of content will reflect the diversity of our community and allow for growth and evolution over time as we learn and strive together.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What ethos informs your scholarly communication program, and what are its central values?
2. What are the concrete ways that you embody or implement these values in your scholarly communication programs, services, resources, or policies?
3. Who within your communities is excluded from full participation in the scholarly communication system and how can you facilitate their inclusion?

NOTES

1. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Planned Obsolescence* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 28–29.
2. *Unbound: A Journal of Digital Scholarship*, home page, https://journals.library.unt.edu/index.php/unbound.
3. Digital Frontiers, home page, https://dsco-op.org.
4. Jane F. McAlevey, *No Shortcuts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10–13.
5. Lauren Klein, "Distant Reading after Moretti," Arcade: Literature, Humanities, and the World, Stanford Humanities Center, January 29, 2018, https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/distant-reading-after-moretti.
6. Digital Frontiers, "Statement of Inclusion and Accessibility," Accessed May 6, 2020, https://dcsco-op.org/inclusion/.

7.   See Haley Di Pressi et al., "A Student Collaborators' Bill of Rights," UCLA HumTech, June 8, 2015, https://humtech.ucla.edu/news/a-student-collaborators-bill-of-rights/; Hannah Alpert-Abrams et al., "Postdoctoral Laborers Bill of Rights," Humanities Commons, 2019, https://doi.org/10.17613/7fz6-ra81; and Tanya Clement et al., "Collaborators' Bill of Rights," In *Off the Tracks—Laying New Lines for Digital Humanities Scholars* (Media Commons Press, 2011), 9, https://mcpress.media-commons.org/offthetracks/.
8.   Public Knowledge Project, "Open Journal Systems," accessed May 6, 2020, https://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/.
9.   Library Publishing Coalition, "About Us," accessed May 6, 2020, https://librarypublishing.org/about/.
10. University of North Texas Libraries, "UNT Libraries Journal Hosting," accessed May 6, 2020, https://library.unt.edu/scholarly-communication/unt-libraries-journal-hosting/.
11. Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), "Core Practices," accessed May 6, 2020, https://publicationethics.org/core-practices.
12. *Public Philosophy Journal*, "Formative Peer Review," accessed May 6, 2020, https://publicphilosophyjournal.org/about/review/ (page discontinued).
13. *Unbound: A Journal of Digital Scholarship*, "Call for Contributions," November 23, 2019, https://journals.library.unt.edu/index.php/unbound/announcement/view/3.

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