WHEN IS A PAPER REALLY RESEARCH? ETHICAL CHALLENGES IN UNDERGRADUATE PUBLISHING

Kennesaw Journal of Undergraduate Research (KJUR)

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INTRODUCTIONS



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THE PROBLEM:
“RESEARCH PAPER” ≠ RESEARCH

- At KSU, courses such as ENGL 1102 introduce students to research, source evaluation, argumentation, and academic writing.
- Within the context of the course, these assignments are appropriately considered research papers.
- However, “research paper” in a classroom does not always mean “original research” in a scholarly publishing context.
- Students may then submit these papers to KJUR believing that completing a research paper means the manuscript is automatically appropriate for a research journal.
- This leaves editors with a difficult question: **Where do we draw the line between a successful research-based class assignment and publishable undergraduate research?**

“RESEARCH PAPER” VS. RESEARCH PAPER

A paper can be excellent coursework without necessarily being publishable research.

Class Research Paper

- Demonstrates understanding of existing literature
- Synthesizes information
- Responds successfully to an assignment prompt
- Written primarily for evaluation by an instructor

Publishable Undergraduate Research

- Clear research question/purpose
- Appropriate scholarly literature
- Analysis or inquiry beyond summary
- Scholarly contribution
- Written for an audience beyond the classroom

WHAT IS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH?

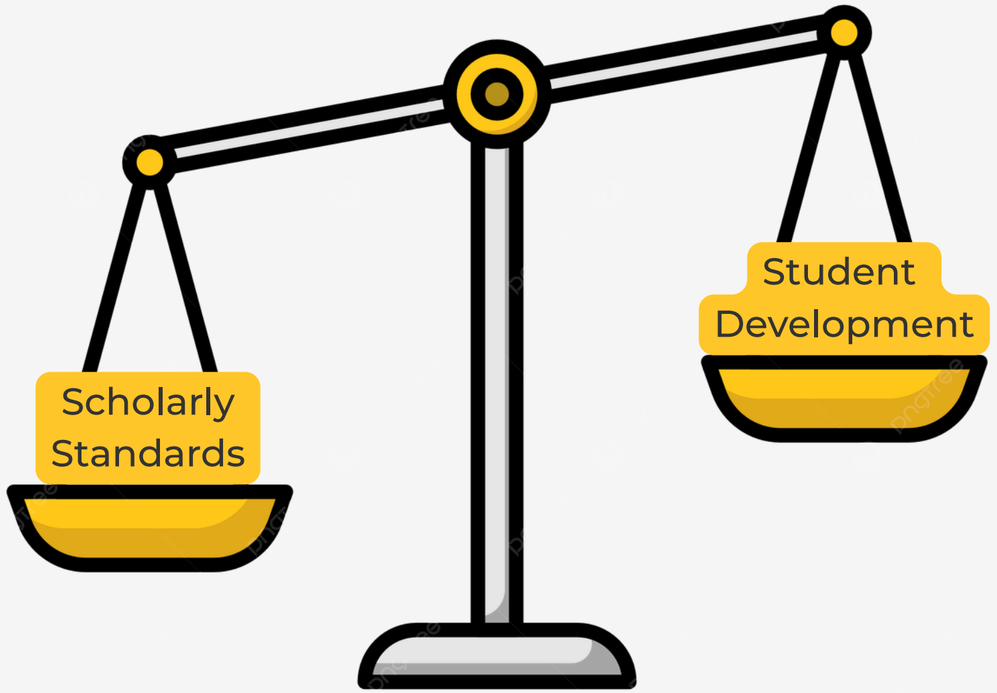
A mentored investigation or creative inquiry conducted by undergraduates that seeks to make a scholarly or artistic contribution to knowledge.

-Council on Undergraduate Research

THE BALANCING ACT

Scholarly Standards or Student Development

- **Scholarly publication:** maintain standards, protect credibility, publish meaningful scholarship.
- **Student development:** teach publishing, introduce peer review, develop scholarly writing, mentor emerging researchers.
- How do we support developing scholars without lowering the standards that make publication meaningful?



BEFORE SUBMISSION

COURSE ASSIGNMENT → PROFESSOR ENCOURAGES OR REQUIRES SUBMISSION → STUDENT SUBMITS TO KJUR

BUT, HAVE THEY CONSIDERED...

PURPOSE

STUDENT INTENT

READINESS

COMMITMENT

FACULTY ROLE

Note to instructors and authors: Due to the very limited reviewer resources of this undergraduate journal, please do not assign submission to this journal as a class assignment or an extra credit opportunity. Our experience has shown students may submit for an assignment, with no intention to follow the process through, challenging our limited resources and delaying the review and publication of students who are submitting with the goal of publication.

STATEMENT FROM THE UNDERGRADUATE JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE

FACULTY APPROVAL

- Faculty are able to provide the expertise that undergraduate students lack
- What are we asking faculty to agree to when they approve?
  - “I supervised this student.”
  - “I read the manuscript.”
  - “This was good coursework.”
  - “The methods are appropriate.”
  - “The student's claims are supported.”
  - “This represents original research.”
  - “This is ready to enter scholarly peer review.”





INITIAL SCREENING

- Weak or noncredible sources
- Heavy reliance on websites/popular sources
- Mostly summary rather than analysis
- No clear scholarly contribution
- No identifiable research question or purpose
- Assignment-style structure
- Citation/reference problems
- Limited methodological rigor
- Paper does not fit journal scope

INITIAL SCREENING EXAMPLE

Clarkson, Kelly. "@taylorswift13 Just a Thought, U Should Go in & Re-Record All the Songs That U Don't Own the Masters on Exactly How U Did Them but Put Brand New Art & Some Kind of Incentive so Fans Will No Longer Buy the Old Versions. I'd Buy All of the New Versions Just to Prove a Point." *Twitter*, Twitter, 13 July 2019, twitter.com/kellyclarkson/status/1150168164853882880?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1150168164853882880%7Ctwgr%5E8779c79a997caa5d054958dc480e1be6e1d2d9b3%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cosmopolitan.com%2Fentertainment%2Fcelebs%2Fa29807801%2Ftaylor-swift-scooter-braun-scott-borchetta-tyrannical control-amas-netflix-doc%2F.

A tweet can be an appropriate scholarly source when it is the subject of analysis, but here the citation was used without sufficient scholarly support.

[EDIT DETAILS BASED ON PAPER, FIRST SENTENCES ARE SPECIFIC TO ARTICLE AND ISSUES IN EACH PAPER MAY BE DIFFERENT]

Title:

Author:

Reviewed on

This paper covers an important topic and is relevant to current events. It is an interesting read that helps put into perspective the disparity between how men's and women's sports are treated. However, at this time, this paper cannot be considered for publication in the *Kennesaw Journal of Undergraduate Research*. Specifically, this paper does not meet the definition of research. It is an argumentative essay or literature review, both of which are not research. According to the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR), research is an original, scholarly contribution to a given field, and your summary of past research does not further the work of your discipline.

Additionally, there are issues in the formatting and editing of this paper. There are some inconsistencies in the MLA format in the "Works Cited" as well as the in-text citations. There are also several errors throughout the paper, such as run-on sentences, missing words, unfinished sentences, and inconsistent paragraph spacing.

With additional data collection and editing, this paper can be resubmitted for consideration at KJUR. Thank you for your interest in our journal, and we hope to work with you in the future.

EXAMPLE TEMPLATE FROM KJUR

WHEN IT DOESN'T MEET STANDARDS...

We are really asking ourselves "What do we do if it doesn't?"

Minor Problems:	**Substantial but Fixable Problems:**	**Fundamental Research Problems:**
Send forward/ request corrections	Revision before review	Reject



REVISE OR REJECT

“Our objective is to facilitate a learning experience for student authors, regardless of publication outcome.”

Development of a peer-reviewed open-access undergraduate research journal. Journal of Microbiology & Biology Education

REVISION

- Strengthen literature
- Clarify research question
- Explain methodology
- Expand existing analysis
- Reorganize manuscript
- Correct citations

REDO

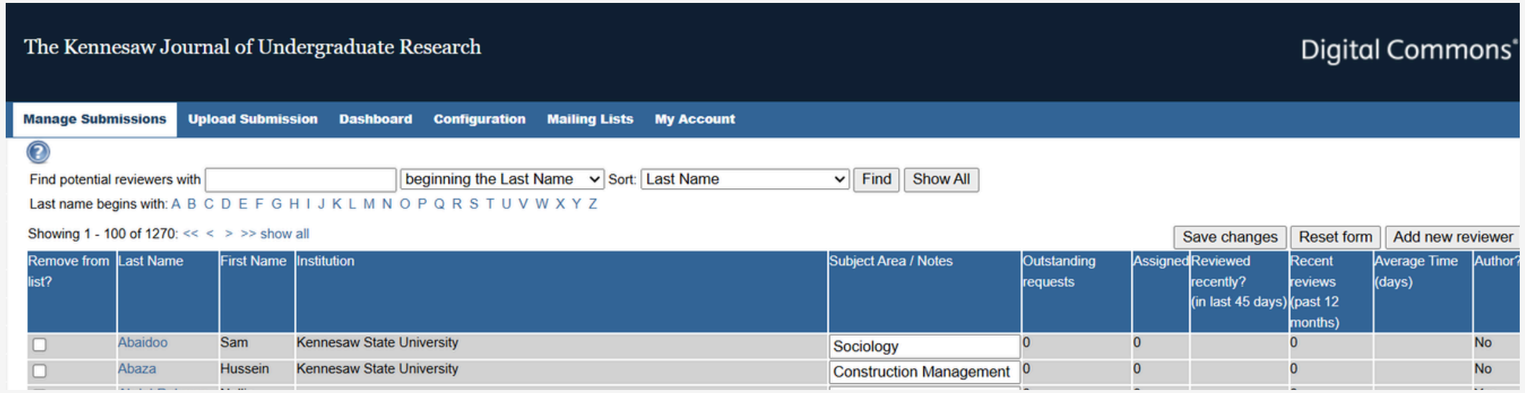
- Invent a research question
- Conduct research that wasn't conducted
- Create an original contribution
- Perform missing analysis
- Replace fundamentally inadequate evidence
- Essentially write a different paper

Communicating Rejection without Discouraging Students

A professional researcher may understand that a rejected manuscript ≠ incapable researcher. However, a first-time undergraduate author may not. So when giving decisions, KJUR needs to communicate:

- What standard wasn't met
- Why that standard exists
- What was valuable about the work
- What would need to change
- Whether future submission/research is possible

HOW WE SELECT FACULTY REVIEWERS

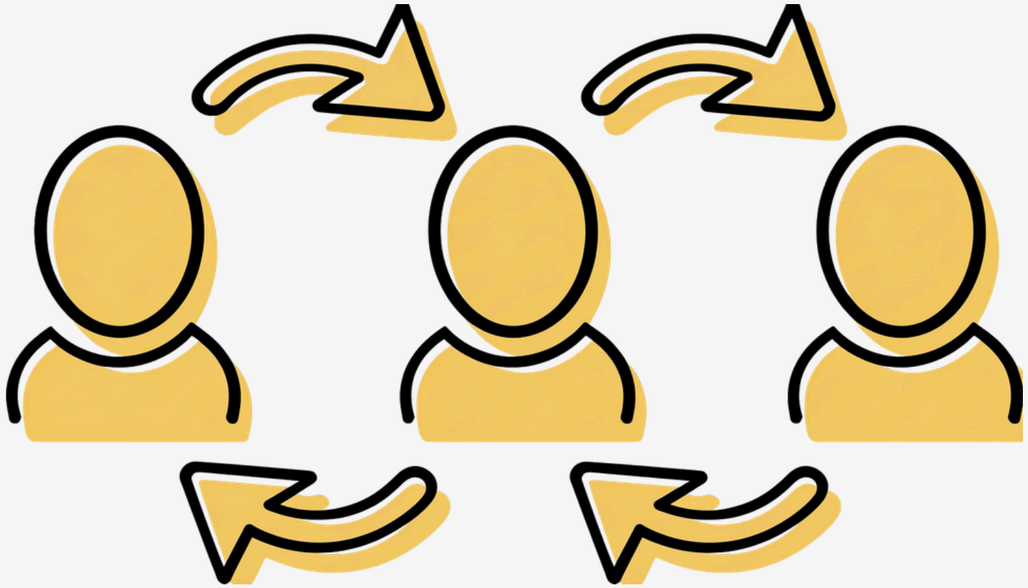


IDENTIFY DISCIPLINE → FIND RELEVANT FACULTY EXPERTISE → CHECK REVIEWER FIT

↓

REASSIGN IF NEEDED ← FACULTY ACCEPTS OR DECLINES ← INVITE REVIEWER

EDITORS AS INTERMEDIARIES



- Reviewers need to critique the manuscript, not the student.
  - Constructive
  - Specific
  - Actionable
  - Professional
  - Relevant
- Editors also have responsibility for what reaches the author. A journal shouldn't simply forward unnecessarily hostile or inappropriate reviewer comments because “that's what the reviewer wrote.”
- Editors aren't just gatekeepers between authors and publication; they're also intermediaries between reviewers and inexperienced authors.

MAINTAINING STANDARDS WHILE SUPPORTING AUTHORS

Undergraduate authors may need more explanation than experienced scholars, but that doesn't mean:

- Ignoring methodological problems
- Accepting unsupported conclusions
- Overlooking weak evidence
- Publishing something because the author tried hard

Instead:

- Same scholarly expectation and more developmental guidance



REVISIONS



Different types of “approval”

- **Course evaluation:**
  - Did the student successfully complete the assignment?
- **Faculty approval:**
  - Is this appropriate to submit for consideration?
- **Peer review:**
  - Does this meet the journal's standards for publication?
- **These aren't interchangeable judgments.**

HOW MUCH HELP IS TOO MUCH?



Editors Can:

- Explain reviewer comments
- Clarify expectations
- Suggest areas needing development
- Explain scholarly conventions
- Help authors understand revision

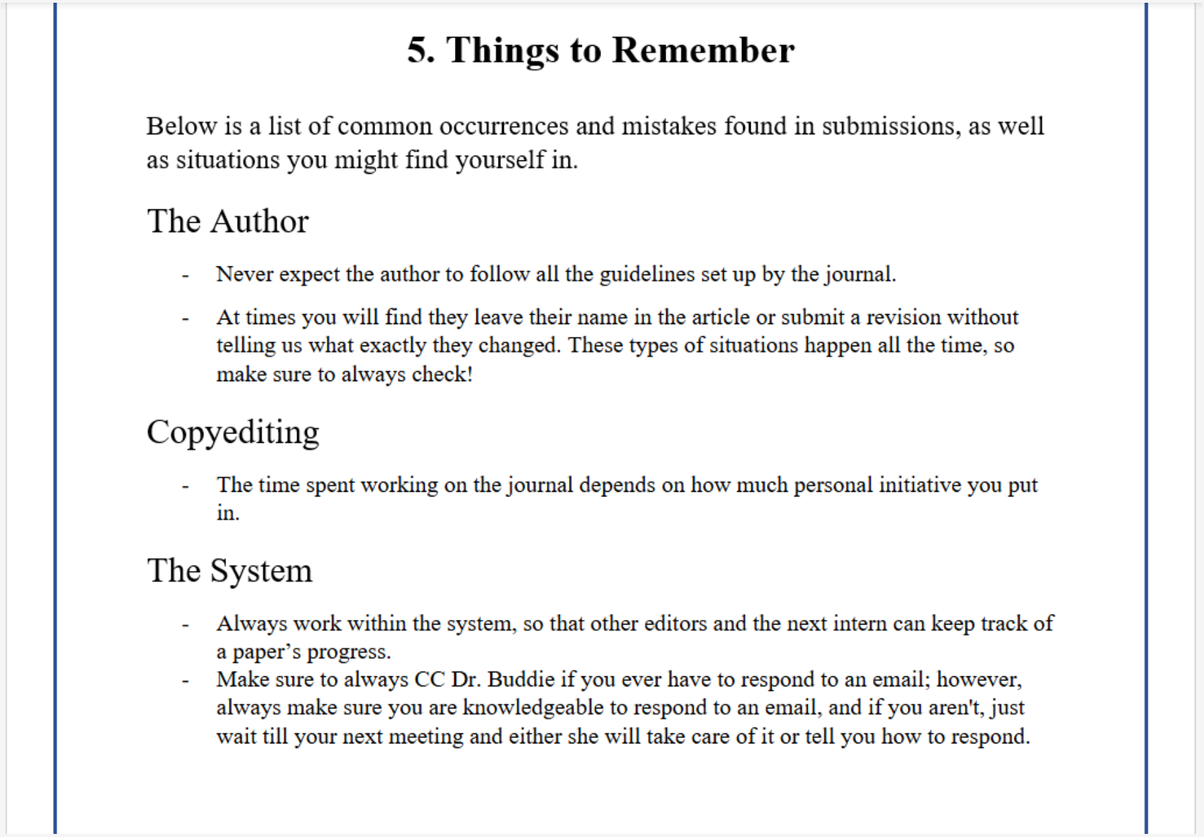
But Should Editors:

- Rewrite sections?
- Locate literature?
- Develop the analysis?
- Repair methodology?
- Create the scholarly contribution?

CONSISTENCY BETWEEN EDITORS

Different editors might interpret the same manuscript differently

- How to keep consistency
  - Shared screening criteria
  - Decision templates
  - Examples of previous decisions
  - Borderline cases discussed as a team
  - Training
  - Documentation
  - Transition between graduating/new editors



5. Things to Remember

Below is a list of common occurrences and mistakes found in submissions, as well as situations you might find yourself in.

The Author

- Never expect the author to follow all the guidelines set up by the journal.
- At times you will find they leave their name in the article or submit a revision without telling us what exactly they changed. These types of situations happen all the time, so make sure to always check!

Copyediting

- The time spent working on the journal depends on how much personal initiative you put in.

The System

- Always work within the system, so that other editors and the next intern can keep track of a paper's progress.
- Make sure to always CC Dr. Buddie if you ever have to respond to an email; however, always make sure you are knowledgeable to respond to an email, and if you aren't, just wait till your next meeting and either she will take care of it or tell you how to respond.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE'VE NEVER SEEN THIS BEFORE?

- **No policy can anticipate everything.**
  - New situation arises
  - Editors discuss it
  - Faculty/editorial advisors consulted when appropriate
  - Decision made
  - Reasoning documented
  - Policy/template/checklist updated if necessary

INDIVIDUAL PROBLEMS MAKE BETTER EDITORIAL PRACTICES

Clarify Expectations

- Original research definitions
- Pre-submission guidance
- Faculty attestation

Standardize Decisions

- Initial screening criteria
- Revision vs. rejection framework
- Shared editor rubric

Support Student Authors

- Developmental decision letters
- Revision-support boundaries

Learn From Experience

- Document new situations/precedents
- Review inappropriate reviewer feedback

BIGGER ETHICAL QUESTION

The challenge isn't choosing between scholarly standards and student development. It's designing a publication process where student development helps authors learn to meet scholarly standards.



To student authors: education, transparency, respect



To readers: credible scholarship



To reviewers: structured and fair process



To faculty: clearly defined expectations



To future student editors: institutional memory



To scholarship: integrity



THANK YOU!

Questions or Comments?

The KJUR team can be contacted at kjur@kennesaw.edu

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