

EDITOR'S REPORT 2006-2007
SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION: A QUARTERLY REVIEW

25 July 2007

David Yamane, Editor
Department of Sociology
Wake Forest University
Winston-Salem, NC 27106
sored@wfu.edu

I. Changes to Policy and Practice

The major changes I made to the journal's policies and practices – described in my 2005-2006 annual report – have now been in place for nearly two years. They seem to be well-institutionalized at this point. I have had few problems receiving or processing manuscripts. Almost all papers we receive now come with all of the required components: a submission checklist, three hard copies, and an electronic copy of the manuscript. Over the past year, I have not sent anyone a copy of the submission checklist, which indicates that our contributors are having no difficulty accessing our website.

Two minor changes that have been or will be implemented since my last report are described below.

Submission Requirements

When the "Notice to Contributors" appears in the spring 2008 issue (it is published in full in the first issue of each volume, as well as being available on the journal's website), it will be revised to require authors to submit just *one* hard copy of their manuscripts rather than *three*. Given a choice, almost all reviewers request to receive manuscripts for review by e-mail, so we frequently have to recycle two of the three copies of the paper that are submitted – an unconscionable waste of resources. Having the authors send in one hard copy will give us the file copy we need, and if one or more of the reviewers request to receive the papers in hard copy for review, then we can print those few copies out here. This will add somewhat to our office expenses, but not enough to justify the waste of recycling two-thirds of most papers we receive.

Submission Fee

Initially, after reviewing the submission fees at a number of other sociology journals, I reduced our submission fee from \$25 to \$15 for nonmembers of the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR). One concern with this change was that a lower submission fee might screen out fewer marginal submissions. Last year, I reported that I did not see any clear relationship between paying the \$15 submission fee and submitting less adequate manuscripts. Of the manuscripts that I editorially "deflected" in 2005-2006 – those that had such serious problems that I did not send them out for peer review – nine were by ASR members and eight were by individuals who paid the submission fee. I concluded that the lack of a submission fee for ASR members may generate more problematic manuscripts than the lowered submission fee for nonmembers.

Unfortunately, this was a misinterpretation of the data. Because the vast majority of submissions

to the journal are by ASR members, nonmembers who paid the submission fee were vastly *overrepresented* among the manuscripts which were highly problematic. Therefore, I reinstated the \$25 submission fee for nonmembers in the hope of creating a higher barrier for submissions for nonmembers.

II. Editorial Board

When I took over as editor, I established a three-year term of office for associate editors and set the size of the editorial board at 18. The terms of office are staggered or “laddered” so that one third of the board (six associate editors) are replaced each year and the entire board is entirely refreshed every fourth year. (This is standard practice for the editorial boards of the two American Sociological Association journals on which I have served.)

Following this schedule, five long serving associate editors will be rotating off the board in September 2007: John Bartkowski (who served an amazing 9 years on the board!!!), Peter Beyer (5 years), James Cavendish (4 years), Harriet Hartman (7 years), and Lutz Kaelber (7 years). Lorne Dawson also wrapped up six years of service on the editorial board last fall. These individuals generously agreed to stay on the editorial board for the sake of continuity when I took over from Nancy Nason-Clark. I looked to them repeatedly for help and insight over the past two years, which they never failed to provide.

I appointed six new associate editors to take their place beginning in September 2007. Because I cannot commit the next editor to this scheduled rotation, I have appointed the new associate editors for terms running *at least* through August 2009, but no longer than August 2010. The associate editors who will comprise the editorial board as of September 2007 are listed in Appendix 1.

In looking for new associate editors, I welcome nominations of individuals (including self-nominations), particularly those whose backgrounds and views are underrepresented on the current board (for whatever reason). In particular, it is difficult to find international scholars whose English language skills are strong enough to serve; consequently, only three of 18 associate editors are international scholars.

Looking forward, I believe this system of regularly rotating associate editors benefits the journal by offering both continuity from one editor to the next and institutionalized change. As I noted last year, I hope the next editor of the journal will continue it. At some point, the ASR council may want to formalize the practice.

III. Design Changes

The journal’s new cover design is now in place, first appearing on the Spring 2007 issue (Vol. 68, No. 1). Indiana University Printing has generally done a good job working with me to implement this design change. The only problem that has arisen thus far is that the color on the Summer 2007 issue (Vol. 68, No. 2) is darker than on the Spring 2007 issue. The lighter color is correct, and Indiana University Printing is supposed to fix this problem with the Fall 2007 issue (Vol. 68, No. 3).

IV. Journal Web Page

The journal’s website (www.sorjournal.org), hosted by Wake Forest University, went on-line in October 2005. It was redesigned in spring 2006 by a Wake Forest undergrad intern, Benjamin Sinclair, to match the journal’s new design and to improve its functionality.

Since the web site went on-line, I have not received a single message about any problems accessing the site or its contents. (As noted above, no one has asked me to send them the submission checklist because they could not get it on-line.)

Thus far, I have not paid attention to the actual traffic on the site, but next year I hope to be able to report some statistics on usage.

V. Staff Support

Book Review Editor

Jerome Baggett of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley continues to serve as book review editor. He is submitting his annual report separate from this report.

Editorial Assistance

Margaret Polzer continues to act as a managing editor of sorts. She works ten hours a week (on average) for the journal, coordinating the work of the journal's interns, overseeing manuscript processing, and editing copy.

The sociology department at Wake Forest University continues to allow me to give independent study credit to undergraduate students who work as editorial interns for the journal. In the fall of 2006, Lauren Henderson and Adam Abelkop served as interns, and in the spring of 2007, Sarah Gay Barnett and Jessica Muscato served. Each intern works about 4.5 hours per week processing manuscripts, corresponding with authors and reviewers, and doing some light editing.

VI. Editorial Activity

Because this report is due in July of each year, this section covers our activities for the 12 months from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007. Where possible, I also provide comparative information based on last year's report, which covered the ten month period from September 1, 2005 (when I began receiving manuscripts) through June 30, 2006. The information in this section is summarized in Appendix 2.

Manuscript Flow

We received 89 total manuscripts over the past 12 months, including 66 new manuscripts and 23 revised manuscripts. 88 of these were "regular" submissions, that is, not special issue submissions or papers commissioned in any way. The one non-regular submission was Robert Wuthnow's Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture from the 2006 annual meeting.

Unlike last year, there were no manuscripts considered as part of special issues. Counting the Fall 2007 issue, four of the past six issues of the journal have been special issues (67:2, 67:4, 68:1, and 68:3). This seems to be too many for a quarterly journal; therefore, I have placed an unofficial moratorium on special issues, deflecting the three or four inquiries I have received about special issues over the past year.

The 89 total manuscripts we received from July 2006-June 2007 reflect an increase in the flow of manuscripts to the journal, especially revised manuscripts. Over our first 12 months (September 2005-August 2006), we received 78 manuscripts, 73 of which were regular submissions and 5 of which were solicited as part of a special issue.¹ Of the 73 regular submissions, 65 were new articles and only eight were revisions of previously submitted articles.

In her last two years as editor, Nancy Nason-Clark reported receiving 68 total manuscripts (62 regular submissions and six solicited as part of a special issue) in 2003-2004, and 59 total manuscripts (47 regular submissions and 12 solicited for special issues) in 2004-2005.

Counting only regular submissions, the number of manuscripts considered by *Sociology of Religion* have increased from 47 to 59 to 73 to 88 over the past four years. It will be interesting to see whether future years continue to show an increase, stability, or a regression to the mean.

¹Because we have not been receiving manuscripts for two full years, in making this comparisons the twelve month time frames necessarily overlap by two months.

Acceptance Rates

There are many ways of calculating acceptance rates, but the most conventional is the number of papers accepted for publication divided by the number of decisions rendered. Using this measure, our official acceptance rate for the past year is 17.1 percent (12 acceptances out of 70 decisions, including conditional acceptances).

In the past year, I “deflected” (i.e., rejected prior to peer review) far fewer manuscripts than in my first ten months as editor – just three last year, compared to 17 in the first ten months. Therefore, our acceptance rate changes little – it rises to 17.9 percent – when we factor out these deflections.

These acceptance rates are much higher than last year, when the comparable rates were 6.8 percent and 11.1 percent. The difference in the acceptance rates is due largely to the greater number of revised manuscripts we considered in 2006-2007 compared to 2005-2006, because the vast majority of manuscripts accepted for publication are revised manuscripts. Last year, ten of the 12 manuscripts accepted for publication were revised manuscripts, and three of those ten were second revisions.

Editorial Lag

When I acknowledge receipt of a new submission, I tell the author, “My goal is to render an editorial judgment on every manuscript within 16 weeks of receipt.” This is not as fast as American Sociological Association journals, which are encouraged to and sometimes actually do complete editorial review within 12 weeks.² But I continue to believe that it is a reasonable – and I hope attractive – lag time for potential contributors.

Over our first ten months, our editorial lag time was just 9.6 weeks for all manuscripts we received, and 12.8 weeks for manuscripts that received peer review (i.e., excluding “deflections”). For 2006-2007, our editorial lag time for all manuscripts we received was around 14 weeks (mean = 14.3 weeks, median = 13.7 weeks). Because there were so few deflections last year, the average for peer-reviewed manuscripts is only slightly higher.

I continue to benefit from the efforts of our reviewers in returning their evaluations within six weeks. The increase in the editorial lag is strictly due to the additional time it takes us to send manuscripts out for review and to write decisions once the reviews are in. In our first ten months, we were able to get manuscripts and decisions out of our office much faster because we were not also preoccupied with all of the work that is entailed in actually producing issues of the journal. We did not have to edit accepted manuscripts, read two rounds of page proofs for each issue, correspond with authors being published, etc. Now that we are balancing the processing of manuscripts and the production of the journal, I expect the average lag time to be closer to 14 weeks than to ten. But I hope the average never exceeds 16.

²The *American Sociological Review*'s average editorial lag was just shy of ten weeks for 2005, the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* was 11 weeks for 2006, and *Sociology of Education* was 15 weeks for 2006.

Appendix 1:
Associate Editors

Completing service at the end of August 2007 :

John Bartkowski (Mississippi State University) – 9 years of service
Peter Beyer (University of Ottawa) – 5 years of service
Anthony Blasi (Tennessee State University)³ – 1 year of service
James Cavendish (University of South Florida) – 4 years of service
Lorne Dawson (University of Waterloo)⁴ – 6 years of service
Harriet Hartman (Rowan University) – 7 years of service
Lutz Kaelber (University of Vermont) – 7 years of service

Serving through August 2008:

Antony Alumkal (Ilf School of Theology)
Graeme Lang (City University of Hong Kong)
Lina Molokotos-Liederman (Exeter University)
David Smilde (University of Georgia)
Melissa Wilcox (Whitman College)
Melissa Wilde (University of Pennsylvania)

Serving through August 2009:

Anthony Blasi (Tennessee State University)
Omar McRoberts (University of Chicago)
Bill Mirola (Marian College)
Margarita Mooney (Princeton University)
Jen'nan Ghazal Read (University of California-Irvine)
Phil Zuckerman (Pitzer College)

Serving at least through August 2009, but no longer than August 2010:

H.B. Cavalcanti, James Madison University
Terrence D. Hill, University of Miami
Lene van de Aa Kuhle, University of Aarhus (Denmark)
Matthew T. Loveland, Le Moyne College
Sarah MacMillen, Duquesne University
Genevieve Zubrzycki, University of Michigan

³Was scheduled to serve through August 2009, but resigned effective August 2007 due to competing obligations.

⁴Resigned effective October 2006 due to competing obligations.

**Appendix 2:
Summary of Editorial Activity**

	July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007		Sept. 1, 2005- June 30, 2006	
A. Manuscripts Considered				
1. Total	89		66	
a. New Manuscripts		66		59
b. Revised Manuscripts		23		7
B. Review Process				
1. Screened by Editor/Accepted for Review (Regular Submissions)	85		43	
a. Rejected outright		24		6
b. Rejected - revise and resubmit		31		18
c. Conditional acceptance		10		3
d. Outright acceptance		2		0
e. Withdrawn		0		0
f. Pending		18		16
2. Screened by Editor/Rejected (Regular Submissions)	3		17	
3. Special Issue Papers Accepted for Publication	0		5	
4. Papers Commissioned by Editor Accepted for Publication**	1		1	
C. Acceptance Rates (Regular Submissions)				
1. Papers Accepted/All Decisions***	17.1%		6.8%	
2. Papers Accepted/Non-deflect Decisions****	17.9%		11.1%	
D. Editorial Lag (Weeks)				
1. Range for Peer-Reviewed Manuscripts	6 to 34		6 to 29	
2. Mean for All Manuscripts	14.3		9.6	
3. Median for All Manuscripts	13.7		N/A	
4. Mean for Peer-Reviewed Manuscripts	14.7		12.8	
5. Median for Peer-Reviewed Manuscripts	13.9		N/A	
E. Items Published (Vol. 68, Nos. 1-3)				
1. Articles	11			
2. Book Reviews	24			
3. Special Essays/Reviews/Symposia	11			
4. Comments	1			

Notes

*These figures exclude the Presidential Issue from the 2005 annual meeting which was carried over from Nancy Nason-Clark. For complete data from 2005-2006, see last year's annual report.

**Previous year: Christian Smith's "Why Christianity Works." Current year: Robert Wuthnow's Paul Hanly Furfey lecture, "Cognition and Religion."

***Regular submissions only. Includes conditional acceptances.