

The View from the Inside: Some Notes on Academic Publishing in 2024

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Outline of Talk

1. A bit about me & my publishing bona fides

2. Notes on the state of the academic publishing industry

3. How the publication process works in theory & practice

4. Some advice and tips for neophyte authors

About Me

Michael Howlett, FRSC (Professor) BSocSci.(Hon)(Ott), MA(Br Col), PhD (Queen's) is Burnaby Mountain Professor and Canada Research Chair (Tier 1) in the Department of Political Science at Simon Fraser University.

Founder and past Chair (2010-2018) and current Secretary of Research Committee 30 (Comparative Public Policy) of the International Political Science Association and sits on the Executive Committee of of the International Public Policy Association

350+ articles in numerous professional journals in Canada, the United States, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Australia and New Zealand plus many Book Chapters and other contributions.

Books and Articles/Chapters

Author

- Canadian Public Policy (2013);
- Designing Public Policies (2011, 2019, 2024),
- The Policy Design Primer (2019)

Co-author

- Procurement and Politics; (2023),
- Dictionary of Public Policy; (2022),
- Policy Consultancy in Comparative Perspective; (2020),
- Designing for Policy Effectiveness: Defining and Understanding a Concept; (2018)
- Application of Federal Legislation to Alberta's Mineable Oil Sands (2013),
- The Public Policy Primer (2010 and 2018),
- Integrated Policymaking for Sustainable Development (2009),
- Studying Public Policy (2020, 2009, 2003 & 1995),
- In Search of Sustainability (2001),
- The Political Economy of Canada (1999 & 1992)
- Canadian Natural Resource and Environmental Policy (1997 & 2005).

350+ articles published in numerous professional journals in Canada, the United States, Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Australia and New Zealand plus many Book Chapters and other contributions.

Edited Books

Canadian Forest Policy (2001)
 Routledge Handbook of Policy Tools (2022)
 Policy Success in Canada (2022);
 Routledge Handbook of Policy Styles (2021);
 A Modern Guide to Public
 Policy (2020); Collaboration in Public Service
 Delivery (2019);
 Making Policies Work (2019); Routledge
 Handbook of Policy Design (2019);
 Policy Styles and Policy Making (2019); Policy
 Capacity and Governance (2018);
 Elgar Handbook of Policy Formulation (2017);
 Routledge Handbook of Comparative Policy
 Analysis (2017);
 Policy Work in Canada (2017);
 Varieties of Governance (2015);
 Policy Paradigms in Theory and Practice (2015);

Regulating Next Generation Agri-Food Bio-
 Technologies (2012),
 The Routledge Handbook of Public Policy (2012),
 British Columbia Politics and
 Government (2009),
 European and North American Policy
 Change (2009);
 Canada's Resource Economy in Transition (2008);
 Policy Analysis in Canada (2007); Deregulation
 and Its Discontents (2006);
 Executive Styles in Canada (2005);
 Designing Government (2005);
 The Real Worlds of Canadian Politics (2004);
 The Provincial State In Canada (1992 & 2000);
 Innovation Systems in a Global Context (1998);
 Policy Studies in Canada (1996),
 The Puzzles of Power (1994 & 1998).

Editorial Work

Past Experience

- English language co-editor of the Canadian Journal of Political Science (2002-2006),
- Co-editor of the World Political Science Review (2003-2014),
- Associate Editor of the Journal of Natural Resources Policy Research, (2011-2013)
- Administrative editor of the Canadian Political Science Review (2007-2010).

Editorial Continued

Current Roles

Journals

- Editor-in-Chief, Policy Sciences - **Oldest & Most Prestigious General Journal in the Field - Hybrid (Springer Nature)**
- Co-editor of Policy Design and Practice - **New Specialized Journal - Open Access (Taylor & Francis)**
- Co-editor of Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis - **Solid Specialized Journal - Hybrid (Routledge)**
- Co-editor of Policy & Society - **No. 1 Ranked Journal in the World - Open Access (Oxford)**

Book Series

- Co-editor of the University of Toronto Press Series in Comparative Political Economy and Public Policy
- Co-editor of the Policy Press International Library of Policy Analysis,
- Co-editor of the Cambridge Studies in Comparative Public Policy
- Co-editor of the Cambridge Elements of Public Policy (New Format)

Editorial Board Memberships

Journals

Canadian Public Administration (1996-2003);

Policy Studies Journal (1992-2003),

Canadian Journal of Political Science (2006-2010),

State and Local Government Review (2007-2010),

Journal of Public Policy (2010-2018),

BC Studies, (2011-2018)

Public Administration Review (2011-2015)

International Review of Public Policy,

European Policy Analysis,

Policy Sciences,

Canadian Political Science Review,

Forest Policy and Economics,

International Review of Public Administration,

Journal of Asian Public Policy,

Chinese Public Administration Review,

China Policy Journal,

Revista Italiana di Politiche Pubbliche,

Energy Research & Social Science,

Journal of European Public Policy,

Perspectives on Public Management and Governance

Book Series

Public Policy and Governance Series,

Palgrave Studies in the Political Economy of Public Policy,

Rowman Series on Challenging Governance,

Palgrave Studies in National Governance and Emerging Technologies,

Routledge Studies in Energy Transitions.

Talk

Academic publishing is an interesting business. It is:

- Very Profitable
- Pays very little & has a captive market (see above)
- Is completely opaque to the public (Peer Review)
- Is used as a metric for academic performance but is not a good one (Impact Factors), and
- Is under stress (Open Access, Predatory Publishing, Alternative Formats & etc).

Today we will talk about all of these elements and then look at the details of the production process and how it works and why, discussing key concepts like Peer Review in some detail along the way.

1. Very Profitable

As a business, academic publishing is very low cost and high demand. This results in:

- Ease of Entry of businesses into the industry (so many players from Oxford University Press to Inderscience, MDPI)
- Consolidation as new smaller presses are swallowed by giants (Elsevier, Routledge/Taylor & Francis, Wiley, Springer Nature)
- Very high profit margins (e.g. Elsevier “has profit margins that outstrip those made by Apple, Google and Amazon. Revenue is reported at almost 3billion, and profit margins ~40% (per year) – Manchester Guardian

2. Pays very little (see above)

One of the reasons for this high return is that very few people who 'work' for the publisher get paid

- Of course they pay their staff but unlike in the old days, often do not have printing, don't need to store copies and mail them out like they used to as most things are now electronic/digital
- More to the point though, except for some editors of very big journals (like the New England Journal of Medicine or the Lancet, who get paid very well - \$200-300 USD per year) very few people who contribute content to the journal get paid at all – authors don't get paid, reviewers don't get paid and neither do most editors or they get a token honoraria.

Another key factor is the captive market that exists in University and College Libraries worldwide

So, captive market and low costs = high profits

3. Is Completely Opaque

Most people don't know how journals esp operate except for some vague notions about 'peer review'.

But what is **peer review** in practice? – Much more on this later.

4. Is used as an academic performance metric but is not a good one

- ISI Rankings – no. of cites/no. of publications in the previous two year period.
- First used for Library purchases. Now Clarivate (Thompson Reuters).
- Plus rivals like Scopus &etc as job performance metrics
- Goodhart's law – metric linked to performance ceases to be a good metric – gaming (5000 authors, changes at last minute, false e-mails for suggested reviewers &etc).

3. Is used as a metric for academic performance but is not a good one

5. Is an Industry Under Stress

- The Digital Challenge
- Open Access
- Predatory Publishers
- Alternative Publication formats – preprints, Palgrave Pivot, Cambridge Elements
- Alternative Review Processes – Open Review
- Pirates (Sci-hub)

The Digital Challenge

OJS and Other Systems – Ease of Creating new Journals (CPSR Model)

The Open Access Challenge

- Traditional Model – Library Fee/Closed Access/ Association Sponsorship
- APCs vs Library Fees
- Massive Meta-Journals (Plos1/ PeerJ/ Open BioMed & Sage Open)
- Research Repositories (Legal and Illegal): Research Gate/ SSRN/ Mendeley/ Acadamia.edu/ SciHub &etc

Predatory Publishers

- MDPI/Inderscience/Hindawi
- Fake Journals

Alternative Models

- Massive Meta-Journals (PLOS1 (20,000+ articles per year)/ PeerJ/ Open BioMed & Sage Open)
- Research Repositories (Legal and Illegal): Research Gate (Microsoft - Gates)/ SSRN (Elsevier)/ Mendeley (Elsevier)/ Academia.edu (Tencent - WeChat)/

Alternative Review Processes

Open Review

Pirates

SciHub & Others

The Peer Review & Publication process

- for Journals but also applies in most cases in a similar fashion to books and edited books

A Note on Plagiarism and Dual Submission

Differences in Peer Review (Anonymity & Conflict of Interest)

- Not Blinded (non-refereed)
- **Refereed**
 - Blind,
 - Double Blind,
 - Triple Blind
- Reviewed
- Open Review

The Publication Process in Practice

Stages

Initial Submission & Format Choice

– Special Issues, Research Articles, Research Notes, Discussion and Commentary

Editorial Process

- Desk Review
- Assignment to Editor
- Assignment to Reviewers
- First Decision – Reject, Major R&R, Revisions, Minor R&R, Accept
- Revisions
- Re-Assignment
- Second, Third Decision If Needed

Production

- Copy Edits, Page Proofs, Early View, Final Publication – typically farmed out to freelancers and firms in India (Chennai). Very Professional. Deal with hundreds of thousands of articles in all fields. Not boutique. Increasingly digital
- for Journals but also applies in most cases in a similar fashion to books and edited books

Peer review in practice

- Journals – Gold Standard – Double Blind
- Books - similar but often not anonymous (single Blind)
- Edited books – Similar but not by chapter normally (single Blind)

Decision Rule

Minimum two unambiguous recommendations

Editorial Discretion is Limited

Notes from Inside

- Peer review is annoying but works – takes time, often contradictory, response to reviewers
- Reviewers are a scarce commodity for Journal Editors
- Editor is your friend – Early rejection a blessing

Tips for Neophytes

- Observe Journal Mandate and research recent issues & topics
- R&R result is **STANDARD**
- **Do your research pre-submission, respond with patience to reviews, work with the Editor and Production Companies**

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