

## **Mission for the Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation**

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### **A. Why a new journal?**

1. We have excellent journals in evaluation, and it would be hard to argue for simply adding one more of their kind to their numbers. But if professional evaluation is going to help improve the world, as many of us strongly believe it can, it must take seriously the task of communicating current developments and skills to the evaluators, evaluation users, and would-be evaluators amongst those people in the world who can't afford to subscribe to the traditional journals or attend the traditional workshops and courses of study. Those people include impecunious students in the industrialized nations, as well as impecunious teachers and community members there, and most people in the primarily rural/agricultural nations. So this journal is different in that it's free. It won't reach everyone who could use it, because not everyone can get to and use a computer terminal with online capability, and read English, but it will be available to several million people that can, and that number is increasing fast.
2. As some of you know, the great war between the commercial publishers that control most of the scholarly journals, and the great libraries that have been making those publishers rich via the massive increases in library subscriptions has at last resulted in a battle won for scholarship. After an abortive effort at negotiation by, amongst others, the State University of New York libraries, the University of California recently simply refused to

pay the latest increase, and the publishers backed down, cutting about \$1 million dollars (U.S.) off the annual bill. Harvard and Cornell are simply canceling 300 journal subscriptions between them; the Research Triangle Libraries (Duke, UNC, NCSU) are doing the same. It's hard to say how that war will turn out, but scholarly interests are obviously served by facilitating the option of online publication, and the Senates at Cal, Stanford, SUNY, and Connecticut have moved to encourage scholars to use, and create, less commercial publishing outlets including online ones. As a leading advocate of online publishing recently put the situation on that front, "there are currently a thousand peer reviewed journals that appear only online. Among the "open access" ones (free to read) are the British Medical Journal, BioMed Central (a collection of 50 open access journals), Educational Researcher, First Monday, and College English." (Of course, there are many other non-profit ones charging a small subscription to cover expenses.) We aim to develop some experience in the online approach, which we will make available freely to any other evaluation journals that feel they need to facilitate less expensive access to their contents. It's worth noting that Gene Glass' ground-breaking free access journal, the Educational Policy Analysis Archives, has more readers downloading articles than there are readers for all the main paper-based educational research journals put together.

3. There are many other niches in the journal world that need to be filled besides radically reducing the cost of access, given that we start with the belief that the existing evaluation journals are extremely good, and that direct competition with them would be counter-productive. One of these niches, in our opinion, is the need to move towards some coverage of

significant evaluation happenings in countries outside North America. We will gradually develop this, as we extend our network of correspondents overseas and from overseas, and we will try to provide some periodic overviews of major meetings, movements, and publications that occur in languages other than English. As we develop increasing numbers of readers in regions such as South America, we will move towards publishing articles and some summaries, in (for that case) Portuguese and/or Spanish. Sign up with your e-mail address in the space provided on our site so as to register interest from your area, and rest assured that your address will not be released to anyone else. (If you are using a school or library or internet café computer, and don't have an e-mail address, send us an e-mail from it to tell us where you are.) And if you attend an interesting meeting outside the Anglophone area, or for that matter inside it, or read something that you think is important and that you think will not be covered, send in your report. Send in a couple of these from Ulaanbaatar and you are likely to be approached with an offer of correspondent status for Mongolia!

4. Another niche. We want to publish good ideas, and we don't care whether they are embedded in a typical journal article, although those are the vehicles that get the peer review treatment. If you can express your idea in a clearly written paragraph or two, or in a memo, or in a letter, and it looks to the editors like something worthwhile, we'll publish it. Your thoughts might be reactions to your own experiences, to the experiences of others, or to previously published material, which could include a well-known book or article, not necessarily one reviewed here. No, that last e-mail you sent to EVALTALK probably isn't going to qualify. But it might dress up well, with some serious further thought—and with some attention to reactions

from others on ETALK—if it’s not too esoteric. Remember, our readership won’t consist of PhDs in philosophy or psychology!

5. And another niche. We’ll review some books, sometimes books that have been out for quite a while but that have been gradually gathering importance or a following. But we often won’t review them in the usual way: we might use two or three reviewers, who might include an ally, a critic, and a bystander. That’s often more interesting and useful to the reader than a single review. And we’ll also encourage the authors to reply to the reviews, in the same or the next issue. Later, the reviewers can reply to the author’s comments. In other words, we want the serious discussion of major emerging movements or themes in evaluation to be strongly supported in this journal. In the same spirit, we’ll hope to get submissions of dialectic pieces—double articles, with one responding to the other.
6. And.... Authors can add postscripts to their articles, a year after they are published.... Or several years later. They can’t alter the original text, and the postscript will be date-stamped, but it can set the record straight when they want to do this, or strengthen the arguments if they want to do this. All articles will be archived and available to the searcher in the usual way.
7. Moreover.... This isn’t just a research journal. It’s a journal aimed at communicating about evaluation to a very diverse readership. That may mean that it should be partly instructional, too. The model of hybrid journal/magazine publications such as *Scientific American* is worth taking seriously. Along with new research results, they often publish overviews of material that the expert knows well, but the outsider or student in that particular field knows little about. In that spirit, too, we’ll do some

reportage on what other journals are covering, for those who can get them through a library. Another common feature of publications like *Scientific American* is an inquiries column where an expert responds to questions from the field. To the extent that our resources permit, we'll explore the inclusion of that kind of material. And that means you can submit that kind of material. Instructors might submit what seems to them a neater treatment of logic models than is found in the standard texts; or their responses to the most common misconceptions about evaluation from students in their mid-career extension course for ward nurses, and someone else may respond to their articles. Could we have an Ethics column? Perhaps, if good questions and good answerers can be found.

8. Furthermore.... In the 0<sup>th</sup> issue of JMDE, which was to be just an introductory flourish to show we're here and working, there's a not-too-serious piece called 'Zen and the Art of Everyday Evaluation'. Zen masters are famous for their use of puzzles, known as koans, which illustrate some deep point in Zen thought. There's an evaluation koan in this article, and it's the first of what we hope will be a series of problems or puzzles that we'll publish from time to time. And of course there will be some prizes for the best answers, usually an interesting book. If you come across or think up an interesting puzzle about evaluation, send it in! We will probably dig up a prize for the year's best entry. This article and many handwritten pages were on a clipboard stolen from Michael Scriven in Canada this summer. It has been replaced in Issue 1.
9. Besides which.... What else could we do that would be interesting and useful? We welcome your suggestions. (10)You're already thinking about the use of photos? Right, so have we, though the technical problems are not

trivial for the software we're using. (11) You thought of color, too, perhaps for concept maps and logic diagrams? You can bet we'll be working on that, it's a potentially substantial advantage of the online medium. (12) How about cartoons? Send them in; become the first famous evaluation cartoonist! (13) What about material from the dozen other fields of evaluation that have attained professional status, such as policy studies and personnel evaluation and product evaluation? That's one of the reasons for the title; we want to encourage border crossing, and there's perhaps room for more of it than finds its way into the existing journals. (14) And how about exploiting the greatest strength of online publication: the response speed? We will put out special issues when it seems urgent to do so: for example, it might have been helpful to do one on the 'Causal Wars' that split the evaluation community last year, with of course both sides well represented. This is not a vehicle for a partisan approach to evaluation: to the extent that we can provide diversity and civility, which will be our aim.

10. We have some other ideas, but perhaps 14 suggestions will be enough to indicate that *JMDE* ("Jim Dee") has a place on the team bench. With your help, we can fill that place and expand it too.

## **B. Why this title?**

We considered many titles. Googling them revealed that almost all had been taken or virtually taken. But we rather like this one, because it suggests something that's important to us, the notion that the essence of evaluation, not just historically but in practice today, is its multiple lineage. We'll try to illustrate that in the pages we publish, and hope that authors will be attracted by it. And there's nothing esoteric about the title: the phrase "multidisciplinary evaluation" generated 318,000 hits on

Google recently, so the term is one in common use, notably in the medical and psychiatric fields where it refers to the efforts at diagnosis that require specialists from very different fields to collaborate. In program evaluation, this most obviously connotes the collaboration between the subject matter expert and the evaluation expert. But that's just an epidermal analysis. The fact is that there's often a need for an expert cost-analyst, an expert focus group or survey specialist, an expert on text analysis or case study, maybe an attorney or an organizational development or a community development specialist, or an expert on another culture or from a distinctive community. Many of us become pretty good at several of these specialties, but the big shops often have them on staff or standby.

Moreover, there is often a multiple disciplinary interaction at the subject-matter level, not just in applied psychology and medicine; for example, an authority on eLearning prefaced an online discussion a couple of weeks ago by saying "e-Learning involves multiple disciplines e.g., philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, anthropology, artificial intelligence (e.g., Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED)), and human computer interaction." Evaluation of e-learning courses or programs, and many other kinds of evaluand, is often, perhaps typically, like this; and it may be good to pay more attention to this feature of it than we have done in the past. Hence the title. (And why *JMDE*, not *JME*? Out of respect for the *Journal of Moral Education* and the *Journal of Management Education*!)

### **C. Who is producing it?**

The co-editors will be Jane Davidson from New Zealand and Michael Scriven from Michigan, aided by a distinguished and diverse international Advisory and Review Board to which we will continue to add people for some time, as the new network develops. Assistant editors will be a group of the doctoral students at the

Evaluation Center at Western Michigan, headed by associate editors Chris Coryn and Daniela Schröter. We aim to make this the equivalent of the Law Review experience for them. The list of correspondents, like the Advisory Board, will be posted on our website as it develops. Western Michigan is kindly helping with the website, courtesy of Arlen Gullickson, Director of the Evaluation Center, and Dale Farland, our Webmeister. The initial website is [evaluation.wmich.edu/jmde](http://evaluation.wmich.edu/jmde/), though we're applying for [jmde.com](http://jmde.com).

Special thanks, too, to the Canadian Government, for funding the development and free distribution of the software we are using, designed precisely for the management of online, free access, journals; and to Professor Willinsky, of the University of British Columbia, the expert on electronic publication quoted earlier, who has helped us with access to that software. And thanks to Gene Glass, the founder and editor of the highly successful EPAA, his online refereed journal that invented a number of the ingenious procedures we'll be using; we're especially glad to have him on our Advisory Board.

#### **D. How Can Others Help With It?**

(i) Please help to spread the word that a new journal is available, with a broad vision and interests. And, (ii) since its value will depend on what it publishes, make sure to keep *JMDE* in mind for things you'd like to have published. We will make that as easy to do as we can, including eventually an effort to publish material in your native language. Remember that you should be able to reach a whole new audience through us, a very important part of the world's population. And remember that online refereed journals are now widely endorsed as respectable entries in your cv. (iii) If you have special interests or skills that you'd like to be sure are represented in *JMDE*, sent us a note and a sample or



two of your work. (iv) Everyone, please think about other things we can do that aren't already well done; and (v) suggest the most interesting puzzles about evaluation you have or you encounter—they can form the basis for a cutting edge discussion here. Other ways to help are mentioned throughout the earlier sections.

Practical postscripts: (a) In the interests of quality peer-reviewing, articles submitted to *JMDE* should be written without detectable authorship in the manuscript itself, only in the covering letter—which won't go out to the referees. If you can, please use Microsoft Word with 1" margins all round, 1.5 line spacing, and Times 14 point font; e-mail if possible. We don't insist on APA style or any other; just intelligibility and consistency. Please don't submit an article that is under consideration elsewhere, it wastes referee and editorial time. In return, we'll get you a decision very quickly, within three weeks from receipt.

(b) The *JMDE* effort is a kind of safety-net counterpart—in the field of publishing brief scholarly materials—to the AEA Monograph Series. The latter provides direct cost-competition to the publishers of hardcopy books, by publishing books at \$15. That market is one in which one can't compete without some cash flow to cover author's time and printing costs, so free online access is not feasible, and paid online access is still not secure. The big commercial publishers in both domains—books and journals—are substantially similar, led by Elsevier and Kluwer, so the aim is to shake their increasingly life-threatening grip on the distribution of scholarly knowledge, at least in the field of evaluation.

(c) When writing to us, to ensure attention, add “*JMDE*” to whatever else you put in the subject line. These virus-ridden days, no one should open attachments that cannot be identified prior to opening.