

Why Does Running an Electronic Journal Need Any Money?

Michael Scriven

School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences, Claremont Graduate University

The following is a quotation from the latest issue (9/07) of a fairly new (1995) journal, Sociological Research Online published in the UK.

"Why does running an electronic journal need any money? After all, there are no costs for printing or for distribution. The primary cost is paying for the 'backroom' services of copy-editing, massaging articles into the standard SocResOnline format, arranging for referees' reports, sending out books for review and so on. This is skilled administrative work and we cannot impose on academics to do it and, if we did, it would not be done well. The journal needs to employ an editorial assistant to do this work. In addition, editing a journal like Sociological Research Online is a substantial task and it's only fair for the editor's department to receive some compensation for the time it takes. Then in addition there are the incidental expenses: postage, telephone, stationery etc.

Without eLib (support after August 1998, we need to find a way of obtaining a reliable income. At the same time, the journal needs to continue to be accessible and affordable to its readership all across the world. How to achieve this has been the major concern of the journal's Management Board for the past year.

We have started charging a subscription to institutions from August 1998. A subscription (set at £126 (\$US256) plus tax where applicable) will give everyone accessing the journal through the subscribing institution free entry to the journal and its archive of past issues."

Comment by Michael Scriven

This account is somewhat superficial, since it ignores the costs of support by professional IT (informational technology) staff, AND the cost of maintaining their archive on hard disk servers, for both of which we are extremely grateful to the Evaluation Center. Still it does serve to remind me that professional associations do pay the editors of their journals very substantial sums (e.g., \$10,000), sometimes in addition to the cost of some editorial assistance, usually at an hourly rate. The subscription rate set by SRO is of course so high that it would defeat a major goal of JMDE, which is to provide people around the world with current evaluation information and skills without regard to their wealth, beyond the capacity to get online (which is often available through public libraries or schools). SRO do make an effort to meet this need in another way, but it's hard to work out how effective it is. In any case, we are printing this as a reason to forgive us if our editing is not always all it should be!