

YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
Conference Call  
February 29, 2012

**Topic:** JRLYA Advisory Board Request

**Background:** As part of YALSA's last strategic plan, the *Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults* was launched 15 months ago in November 2010. The purpose of *JRLYA* is to enhance the development of theory, research, and practices to support young adult library services, as emphasized in YALSA's Research Agenda. The journal was promoted primarily via a mailing to deans of Library & Information Science schools in Feb. 2011, and via fliers at the 2011 & 2012 ALISE conferences. On December 20, 2011, a call for submissions for the Spring 2012 was issued, with a deadline of Feb. 13, 2012. An editorial calendar for the journal is not available online at this time. A request from the Advisory Board is provided below. The board will want to consider the request and determine the best course of action for moving the journal forward.

**Action Required:** Action

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Proposed alternative publication models for *JRLYA*

Most academic journals experience significant challenges on start-up, and this has been the case with *JRLYA*. Since the journal's founding (the first issue was published in November 2010), the number of submissions has been consistently low, with the number of quality submissions being much lower. During the current editor's tenure, only 14 manuscripts have been submitted, and only 3 have been accepted for publication. While there is nothing inherently bad about a low acceptance rate (in fact, it is considered a good thing in academic circles), it must be coupled with a high submission rate if a quarterly journal is to be successful. Currently, *JRLYA*'s low submission rate of quality manuscripts coupled with the frequency of publication (four times a year) makes for an unsustainable publication model. In fact, in order to have material for the Summer 2011, Fall 2011 and Winter 2012 issues, the editor had to adopt some creative strategies. The posters submitted to the poster session sponsored by the YALSA Research Committee were published in the Summer 2011 issue; the advisory board members each wrote a short piece for the Fall issue; a number of high profile YA researchers have been invited to submit pieces for the Winter 2012 issue.

The purpose of this memo is to discuss likely reasons for the problem and to recommend two alternative publication models and to discuss the benefits and drawbacks of each.

The Problem

It is laudable that YALSA adopted a strategic plan that includes research as a key component. Publishing a research journal is a concrete way of demonstrating that YALSA is serious about encouraging research. However, the low number of quality submissions has made it difficult to fill quarterly issues. The editor is faced, then, with either having few or even no articles for certain issues, or having to publish low quality articles. Either scenario is undesirable and a potential embarrassment to YALSA.

Why so few high quality submissions? The answer is complex but worth considering. There are primarily two potential sources of manuscripts for *JRLYA*: academics and practitioners.

- While there are certainly practitioners doing interesting and high quality research, most practitioners lack the time, funding, and/or administrative support to conduct extensive research projects and engage in academic writing.
- Academics, which include faculty and doctoral students, do, of course, conduct research and engage in academic writing. However, they are under a great deal of pressure to publish in top-tier journals if they are to be successful in getting that first job, earning tenure, or being promoted.
- In addition, there are a number of highly ranked, well-regarded journals that regularly publish research on young adults and libraries, including *Library Quarterly*, *Library and Information Science Research*, *Journal of the American Society for Information Science & Technology*, *School Libraries Worldwide*, and *School Library Media Research*, as well as a number of children's literature journals, such as *Children's Literature*, *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, *Children's Literature in Education*, and *The Lion & the Unicorn*. In other words, for academics engaged in high quality research and writing on young adults and libraries, there are several high quality outlets in which to publish.
- Moreover, publishing an article in a well-regarded and more general-interest LIS journal, such as *Library Quarterly*, *JASIST*, or *LISR*, means that one's article reaches a wider readership among academics, not just those with a youth services focus.

All of these factors make it very difficult for a newcomer like *JRLYA* to gain footing in the world of academic publishing. The conundrum is that no one with high quality research can afford to publish in a journal that is not well-known and well-regarded, but a journal cannot become well-known and well-regarded if no one with high quality research is willing to publish their work there.

There are, however, alternatives to the current publishing model that *JRLYA* is using, which we believe will help address these issues.

#### Alternative 1: The *SLMR* Model

In keeping with *JRLYA*'s mission as it is currently stated, the journal could adopt a "rolling" publication schedule, as is the case with *School Library Media Research*, a well-regarded, refereed online journal published by AASL. Essentially, *SLMR* publishes articles as they are accepted and approved by the editorial board. The journal is organized by year, and the number of articles that appear in any given year depends on the number of high quality submissions received. The journal has published as few as three articles (2003) and as many as ten (2007, 2008, 2011).

The advantage to adopting this model for *JRLYA* is that the journal could maintain its current mission and editorial policy with the only significant change being in the publication schedule (rolling rather than quarterly). The main disadvantage would (likely) be the relatively low number of articles published each year, particularly during the first few years. Over time, however—and this would be years rather than months—the reputation of the journal as a venue for publishing high quality research would increase and the number of articles would increase as well.

#### Alternative 2: The *Library Trends* Model

*Library Trends* is a general-interest, quarterly journal published by Johns Hopkins University Press. It makes frequent use of guest editors, chosen by the editorial board, and devotes issues to various themes. While there is editorial oversight, the journal does not employ a rigorous peer-review process.

If *JRLYA* were to adopt this model, there would be three principal advantages: the journal would be able to publish more articles (though of varying quality); the editing duties could be shared among many people and the editorial oversight could be handled by the editorial board rather than having a single “permanent” editor; and readers would be aware of a regular publication schedule and would know when to expect a new issue. The principal disadvantage would be that this would move the journal away the original mission and would make it harder for the journal to gain a reputation as a high quality research journal.

In any case, it seems unwise to try to continue publishing *JRLYA* quarterly. *Library Trends* is a well-established journal, and, because it deals with all aspects of librarianship and information science, it has a much larger number of potential submitters. *JRLYA* could use the following model:

- Two issues per year—one in the fall (October) and one in the spring (April)
- The spring issue would publish the papers presented at the Young Adult Literature Symposium the previous fall. The editorial review process (other than final proofreading) would have already been done by the Symposium’s paper review committee.
- The fall issue would be guest edited by someone chosen by the editorial board. This issue could be devoted to a particular theme as proposed by the guest editor and/or board. The guest editor would oversee the editorial process.

#### Request for Action

Because the current publication model is unsustainable and, if continued, will likely result in embarrassment for YALSA, we ask that the YALSA Board consider the two alternatives proposed here and select one so that *JRLYA* can flourish and effectively promote research on young adults and libraries.

--respectfully submitted, Don Latham, Chair, Research Committee; Frances Jacobson Harris, Chair, JRLYA Advisory Board; Sandra Hughes-Hassell, Editor, JRLYA

### Additional Resources

- “Launching & Sustaining a Scholarly Journal on the Internet,” <http://bit.ly/w6zHvN>
- JRLYA, [www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/](http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/)
- *Library Trends*: [www.press.jhu.edu/journals/library\\_trends/](http://www.press.jhu.edu/journals/library_trends/)
- *School Library Media Research*:  
[www.ala.org/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/schoollibrary](http://www.ala.org/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/slmrb/schoollibrary)
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