P03 / Policy Studies and the Peer Review Crisis: Status Quo and Ways Forward

Topic : GOVERNING CRISIS

Chair : Regine Paul (Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Köln, Germany)

Second Chair : Rosana Boullosa (University of Brasilia/Brazil and Enap/Brazil)

Third Chair : Rachael Dobson (Birkbeck College)

Fourth Chair : Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

“Where have all the reviewers gone? Is the peer review concept in crisis?” These questions, here asked by Lynn E. DeLisi (2022) in *Psychiatry Research*, is pressing also for journals which publish work in our field of policy studies. The system of voluntary and unpaid peer review has been the cornerstone for quality assurance in scholarly knowledge dissemination and, as De Lisi describes from her 50 years of experience in journal editing, has formerly been considered a privileged obligation for anyone aiming to belong to the scholarly community. Despite criticism for being slow, hampering innovation, not avoiding editorial and reviewer biases, not always preventing low quality publications, and one-sidedly benefitting the business models of large publishers, most scholars would agree that peer review continues to perform a crucial function for creating trust in scientific communication (Kelly et al. 2014).

However, editors from journals in our field, as in other disciplines, find it increasingly difficult to recruit suitable reviewers for submitted manuscripts – to an extent where colleagues already diagnose a veritable “reviewer fatigue” in political science (Breuning et al. 2015). This crisis has intensified with the arrival of more and more journals, increasing publication pressure on younger scholars for tenure positions, growing workload for faculty and, more lately, the pandemic. Attracting available reviewers, in specific sub-areas, themes or subjects, and keeping to deadlines and qucik turn-around of feedback to authors are increasing challenges. If we add factors such as high quality and depth of reviews, as well as the relevance of feedback, and adherence to the purposes and culture of the respective journal, challenges become even greater. If editors in our field continue to struggle finding suitable reviewers and/or to provide timely feedback to authors, our publication model as a whole is at stake.

This debate is open and far from having reached any consensus. Debated solutions include payments for reviewers, non-monetary rewards such as free access to a journal or public recognition models, editorial collectives, the integration of review duties into tenured positions, but also the abolition of “revise and resubmit” decisions (Flaherty 2022). But to what extent do these solutions solve the problem, or not, or potentially create new ones? For example, most proposals barely touch the individualistic dimension of this (collective academic) task, the different dimensions that require engagement (beyond "just" submitting a review), the problem of the quality of the “product”, the training of academics to become good reviewers, or most scholars' lack of time engaging in this demanding process.

This roundtable seeks to take stock of the challenges different journal editors and board members in our field experience, the solutions they discuss. We believe that - though competition on the journal publishing market is fierce - it is time for a collective discussion of how to create a sustainable future for high quality peer review in our field.

(see specific questions for the panel/roundtable in the call for papers/participation)

CALL FOR PAPERS

In a roundtable format, this session seeks to address three questions against this background:

(1) How does the peer review crisis affect different journals in our field?

(2) Which strategies do journals develop to address the peer review crisis?

(3) How can the policy studies community address the peer review crisis more broadly?

We call for statements of interest to speak to these questions in a roundtable format from editors and

editorial board members of journals publishing in the field of policy studies. These statements (no more than 500 words) should briefly outline answers to the above questions from the lens of a specific journal/editor.

The session will be co-organised by Rosana Boullosa and Regine Paul (Editors, *Critical Policy Studies*) as well as Rachael Dobson (Editorial Board, *Critical Social Policy*) and Claudio Radaelli (Editor, *International Review of Public Policy*). Anna Durnová and Doug Torgerson support the initiative to jointly reflect upon the peer review crisis.

This event will be in-person, with a hybrid option.

References:

Breuning, Marijke, Jeremy Backstrom, Jeremy Brannon, Benjamin Isaak Gross, and Michael Widmeier. 2015. “Reviewer Fatigue? Why Scholars Decline to Review Their Peers’ Work.” Political Science & Politics 48 (4): 595–600. doi:10.1017/S1049096515000827.

DeLisi, Lynn E. 2022. “Editorial: Where Have All the Reviewers Gone?: Is the Peer Review Concept in Crisis?” Psychiatry Research 310 (April). doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2022.114454.

Flaherty, Colleen. 2022. “The Peer-Review Crisis.” Inside Higher Education. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2022/06/13/peer-review-crisis-creates-problems-journals-and-scholars.

Kelly, Jacalyn, Tara Sadeghieh, and Khosrow Adeli. 2014. “Peer Review in Scientific Publications: Benefits, Critiques, & A Survival Guide.” EJIFCC 25 (3): 227–243.

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Session 1Roundtable: The Peer Review Crisis in Policy Studies

Thursday, June 29th 08:00 to 10:00 (KHS134)

RTt20p03
Rachael Dobson (Birkbeck College)

RT T20P03
Claudio Radaelli (European University Institute)

RD T20P03
Rosana Boullosa (University of Brasilia/Brazil and Enap/Brazil)

RT T20P03
Regine Paul (Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Köln, Germany)

RT Discussant
Oscar Berglund (University of Bristol)