

American Sociological Association to Launch Open Access Scholarly Journal for All Sociology Subfields

Background

At their meetings in August 2013, the Committee on Publications and ASA Council considered a proposal from the Executive Office to partner with SAGE Publications to launch an open access general sociology journal. (See attached.) Both groups were supportive of the concept of such a journal, and each asked for certain aspects of the proposal to be more fully developed and submitted for their next meetings leading toward a final approval by Council at its March 2014 meeting.

Title/Mission Statement

The name for the ASA's open access journal is currently being discussed by the Association's Committee on Publications and Council. It will be the Association's first open access journal covering all subfields of sociology, adding a new resource to ASA's history of publishing the highest quality peer-reviewed scholarship. The open access journal joins the Association's traditional publishing program that currently includes nine journals, an award-winning research-based general audience magazine, and three section-sponsored journals (all in electronic and print format), as well as an open access, e-only section-sponsored journal. The open access journal will provide a new outlet for innovative peer-reviewed scholarship that will be accessed freely and rapidly by users throughout the world. The open access journal will allow authors to submit manuscripts electronically, receive a publishing decision quickly, have article lengths unconstrained by printed page limits, as well as have accepted articles published online immediately after editorial review and acceptance. There is no limit to the number of accepted articles that can be published regardless of content type, article length, or scholarly methods used.

We propose the following as a first mission statement:

Outstanding, Accessible Science and Theory to Meet a Growing World Demand for Timely Sociological Knowledge

The American Sociological Association seeks to meet the growing demand for accessible sociological scholarship that is rigorously but expeditiously peer reviewed, and quickly and freely available in digital format by adding a new open access journal to its collection of outstanding scholarly journals.

The journal will be the Association's first open access journal for all subfields of sociology, adding a new resource to ASA's long history of publishing the highest quality, peer-reviewed scholarship. The open access journal joins the Association's publishing program that currently includes nine ASA journals, an award-winning ASA research-based general audience magazine, and three section-sponsored journals (all in electronic and print format), as well as an open access, e-only section-sponsored journal.

Published by the American Sociological Association, the national association for sociologists that embraces other North American and international colleagues, the open access journal will provide an outlet for new and innovative peer-reviewed scholarship in all areas of sociology that will be accessed freely and rapidly by users throughout the world. "Born open" and without a print version, the open access journal will allow authors to submit manuscripts electronically, receive a publishing decision quickly, have

article lengths unconstrained by traditional printed page limits, as well as have accepted articles published online immediately after editorial review and acceptance without the constraint of assembling a print volume. There is, therefore, no limit to the number of accepted articles published regardless of content type, article length, or scholarly methods used.

The only criterion for publication will be success in a stringent merit assessment conducted through ASA's traditional peer-review process with particular attention to quality of writing and concision. To be led by outstanding editors selected by the ASA Committee on Publications and Council and assisted by an editorial board organized to have expertise in many subject areas, peer review will be thorough and expedited. Revise and resubmit decisions will be exceptionally rare, editorial input to authors on scholarly content will be limited, and text editing will be light. Unlike other ASA journals, authors will retain copyright through CreativeCommons licensing.

Manuscripts will be submitted and reviewed through the same SAGETrack system offered by ASA's current journals, and accepted articles will be hosted on the SAGE HighWire online journal database, offering the benefit of cross referencing and citations with hundreds of other social science journals.

The American Sociological Association holds the value of scholarly communication at the heart of its mission as a disciplinary society. The Association seeks to expand its scholarly publishing activities to meet the increasing national and international demands for free access by scholars, students, policy leaders, and the general public to the very best cutting-edge sociological research, the results of new interdisciplinary inquiry and humanistic social science knowledge as well as new methodologies and theoretical perspectives. ASA's new open access journal will begin this expansion with a flexible publishing approach that can adapt quickly to new technological innovations in communications and in science.

Editor Selection

As ASA works to develop a bridge between traditional publishing and open access publishing, it will be particularly important to identify an inaugural editor who will have both gravitas in traditional scholarly publishing and be recognized as supportive by the open access community.

While the inaugural editor will be integrally involved in the development of the structure of the editorial board, we suggest that a potentially effective model would be one based on "area editors" using the previously approved 17 general categories that comprise ASA's "areas of interest" (see attached list). The inaugural editor of TRAILS has found this to be an extremely effective peer reviewing strategy for covering the broad range of teaching materials submitted to our digital library.

Copyright

With traditional journals, authors are required to transfer exclusive copyright to their article as a condition of publication. Most open access models use author publication charges (APCs) instead of requiring a transfer of copyright. In theory, the revenue from APCs compensates the publisher for the loss of revenue from subscriptions and reprint fees for articles in which it holds the copyright. In effect, the author pays for publication either with their copyright or with a publication fee.

ASA's open access journal will not require a transfer of copyright. Instead, authors will retain copyright to their article and will only to sign over to ASA a limited use license for the article to appear in the online journal.

We propose that articles be published using Creative Commons licenses. Though articles will be freely available to view, using Creative Commons licenses allow specification under what conditions the author agrees his/her article content may be copied, adapted, displayed, distributed, republished, or otherwise reused. Individual license information for each article will be provided on both the article webpage and the PDF cover page. Licenses will require that any reuse include full attribution to the original publication in ASA's open access journal as well as a link (when practical) to the original journal publication.

ASA recognizes, however, that for many authors retaining copyright to their article is an unfamiliar right. Transferring exclusive copyright to a publisher such as ASA or SAGE also means the author gets the benefits of having that publisher's structural protection against misuse of their intellectual work. We are working with SAGE to include in the open access journal information for authors on what steps they can take to protect their intellectual property from unauthorized use and what to do if actual misuse occurs down the road.

Peer Review Process

Central to any ASA journal, including ASA's open access journal, is rigorous peer review; there will be several notable differences in the process for the ASA open access journal compared with the review processes used by ASA's "traditional" journals:

- (1) Peer review will focus on the theoretical contribution of the manuscript as well as determining the quality of research methodology (i.e., determining whether the research was conducted properly, the discussion accurately summarizes the research, and the conclusions follow logically from the research). ASA's traditional journals—partially because of limited print space—also attempt to assess the relative importance of a given article to its respective field. For the open access journal, the editor and reviewers have no artificially imposed pressure limiting acceptances because of printed page limits. If the submission is determined to add to the knowledge base of the discipline and be methodologically sound, it will be accepted.
- (2) Editorial decisions will be almost always either to accept or to reject (although there may be conditional acceptances). Revise and resubmit decisions will be discouraged and used only in exceptional cases.
- (3) While the peer-review process may determine that a submission is unnecessarily long for other reasons and therefore reject, there will be no page or word limit to manuscripts that can be submitted, accepted, and published with only a light editing by professional editors (not the journal editor) to ensure the published article adheres to the *ASA Style Guide*.

Special efforts will be made to educate reviewers on the different decisions and style of review expected for this open access journal.

Financial Model

Obviously, open access publishing raises the concern about the "author pays" financial model upon which this new form of publishing rests. All scholarly publishers are facing the same challenge as that raised by the ASA Committee on Publications to ensure that an author fee structure not limit the openness of scholarly communication by being too costly for scholars. "Open access" to readers cannot limit "open access" to authors.

A fee of \$25 will be charged for all submissions. This fee is non-refundable, regardless of eventual decision, and is intended primarily to reduce the number of inappropriate submissions creating a burden on the editor.

If accepted for publication, manuscripts will be subject to a publication fee. The author fees presented by the Executive Office (in consultation with SAGE) in the initial proposal were well below the open access standard currently in the scholarly publishing marketplace. Nonetheless, ASA has always been sensitive to the inability of some scholars (particularly students and un/underemployed and international scholars) to pay even relatively modest professional fees and this extends to publication fees. It is also important for ASA to be able to offer ASA *members* regardless of financial status a benefit of membership through reduced rates (as we do on virtually all ASA services, publications, subscriptions, and registration fees).

While there was consideration within the Committee on Publications discussion of an income- or academic rank-based publication fee structure, we believe that fewer fee levels are preferable and, given that there is no link between the ASA membership database and the SAGETrack submission and review system, we are unable to verify such information. Since there is no certain market-based means to set a fee structure, we need to establish an initial one and then review it over time based on submissions and other feedback. We will change and adjust fees accordingly. Therefore, we recommend the following initial fee structure for manuscripts accepted for publication in the open access journal:

Regular/Associate ASA Members:	\$400
Student/Emeritus ASA Members:	\$100
ASA International Associates:	\$ 0
Non-member students:	\$150
Other non-members:	\$700

(International Associates are members from countries that are not in the top 35 most globally competitive countries.)

However, with SAGE's support, any author who indicates s/he is unable to afford the fees and requests a waiver will be granted a waiver without question for a trial period of at least the first 12 months. The option to request a waiver will be prominently displayed with as part of the regular fee process.

Revenue from publication fees will be split evenly between the ASA and SAGE.

SAGE will contribute to the ASA open access journal:

- The SAGETrack submission and review software and a half-time offsite editorial assistant to support it;
- Text editing of the manuscript by a Sage editor to ensure *ASA Style Guide* standards are met;
- The HighWire publication platform on which all ASA's other journals and many other journals currently reside (This platform offers the open access journal articles the same benefits of cross referencing and citations with hundreds of other social science journals that are enjoyed by ASA's current journals);
- Financial accounting of publication and submission fees; and
- Advertising and marketing.

ASA will contribute to the ASA open access journal:

- Editors and peer reviewers who will operate remotely from their own locations (i.e., there may be no staffed editorial office when the journal launches although this structure will be reviewed when needed with the inaugural and future editors);
- Editor(s) will receive \$10,000 in start-up support funds for which may be used for course release, travel, supplies, or other editorial expenses as needed. In 2015 and beyond, an ASA honorarium will be set by the Committee on Publications and approved by Council;
- Support from the Executive Office publications and financial departments.

Once the editor has been selected, and the manuscript and review processes are in place, the open access journal (under its final title) can open the door to submissions. Because there are no published volumes or issues, the journal can begin at any time of the year. Digital “Volume 2014” (or 2015) would be as large or small as the flow of accepted manuscripts permits and, we hope and expect, would grow annually thereafter.