How Does *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* Measure Up?

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Understanding the complexities inherent in descriptions of research journals can take significant time and energy, and in the end leave the average psychologist and psychology student wondering—what does it all mean? Why does this matter? In this column, I attempt to provide information to illuminate how journals are described and why we care. Additionally, I will review how our own journal, *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* measures up on these criteria. In short, *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* is a scholarly journal that is peer-reviewed and indexed. Let’s explore these areas so you will feel very excited about this description!

**Our Journal is a Scholarly Journal**

A scholarly journal in psychology has as its primary content reports of original research or in-depth analysis of topics in our field. It is also intended for an academic audience. The articles tend to be long, and in order to be published, they are judged by a jury of peers (i.e., peer-reviewers). These articles are discernible in that the authors are themselves scholars, often with academic affiliations and include substantive documentation to support all arguments advanced (Eland, 2002). Typically articles of general public interest are published in newspapers, magazines, newsletters, or other outlets. Articles published in scholarly journals are intended to contribute to, and further, psychological science. Articles considered for publication in the *Psi Chi Journal* have to be original work and based on empirical observations. The undergraduate authors who submit their work to *Psi Chi Journal* are scholars looking to contribute to furthering psychological science. Unlike research published in the majority of psychology journals, however, the reviewers judge submissions to our journal in terms of whether the projects are “well researched and conceived for someone with an undergraduate level of competence and experience (Psi Chi National Council, 1996).”

**Our Journal is Peer-Reviewed**

When a scholarly journal is peer-reviewed, the articles are submitted to an editor or associate editor who then assigns the article to multiple reviewers (typically two or three). Each reviewer independently reads and evaluates the article for its scientific soundness, including the rationale for carrying out the study and the appropriateness of the methods used to answer the questions of interest. Reviewers also check that statistical analyses are adequate and carried out without error, and that conclusions are based on evidence and not overgeneralized. These reviewers also check for, and provide feedback on, grammar and APA publication style. Peer reviewers are typically psychology faculty who have expertise in the specific area of research of the manuscript. Peer-reviewed journals may also be called “refereed,” and *Psi Chi’s Journal* has been refereed in this manner since it was founded in 1995.

Articles may take months to move from submission to publication because the peer review process takes time. Reviewers have 4 to 6 weeks to read and evaluate the manuscript. The journal editor then reviews all of the feedback and makes a decision about whether the article will (a) be accepted as it was submitted, (b) need revisions prior to being considered for publication, or (c) be rejected. This editorial review process can take another 2 to 3 weeks, especially when reviewers’ feedback is highly incongruent.

The peer-review standard places the *Psi Chi Journal* clearly in the arena of scholarly publications and signals a standard of rigorous scholarship that is highly desirable in academic publications. When an article is peer-reviewed, the reader can more confidently assume that the arguments on which a study rests are based on psychological evidence and that the findings and conclusions can confidently inform scientific developments. Any one reviewer can have a “bad day” or a “blind spot,” but the combined assessment of three scholars with subject-area
expertise along with that of the journal editor is less likely to fall prey to these limitations.

Thus far we have addressed the nature of the content of our Journal (scholarly) and that content’s quality (peer-reviewed). However, we must attend to dissemination factors to ensure that we meet the first subend of Psi Chi’s mission, which is “Advance the science and profession of psychology” (Psi Chi, 2011). How can we possibly advance the science of psychology if very few people are reading our Journal content? Journal indexing addresses dissemination.

**Our Journal is Indexed**

Indexing signals the Journal’s inclusion in a professionally recognized database. Databases such as EBSCOHost and PsycINFO provide a central location in which scholars can search across multiple relevant journals for desired scholarly information. Journals that are not indexed rely purely on subscribers to read their contents and disseminate the information therein at the individual level. Indexes allow broader dissemination of the Journal content to interested audiences.

According to the American Psychological Association (2010) publication manual:

>The scientific journal is the repository of the accumulated knowledge of a field. The findings and analyses, the successes and failure, and the perspectives of many investigators over many years are recorded in the literature. Familiarity with the literature allows an individual investigator to avoid needlessly repeating work that has been done before, build on existing work, and in turn to contribute something new (p. 9).

Competent dissemination of psychological science adds information for prospective and current researchers to best understand the state of the science in a particular area of inquiry. It is imperative that findings be dispersed effectively. Indeed, it is Psi Chi’s ethical and professional responsibility to psychological science and to its authors to attempt to disseminate the findings contained in the Journal as broadly as possible. The Journal is currently indexed in one such database, EBSCOHost (Academic Search Complete). Scholars that have access to libraries that subscribe to Academic Search Complete can have access to Journal citations and PDFs of specific articles. We are not fully satisfied that we meet this criterion. The more indexes the Journal appears in, the broader the reach of the scholarship contained in its pages. This is one area where the Journal’s publication team is hard at work to pursue indexing that is broader within the US (e.g., PsycINFO) as well as overseas. The more indexes in which our Journal appears, the more broadly we will be disseminating Journal articles.

As of today, we can proudly say that our Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research is scholarly, peer-reviewed, and indexed. The Journal will continue to maintain its rigorous scholarly standards. In keeping with the spirit of our mission “to encourage, stimulate, and maintain excellence in scholarship … and to advance the science of psychology” (Psi Chi, 2011) we will also assertively pursue indexing in databases beyond EBSCOHost to ensure that we are extending our reach as widely as possible in the service of our members and our academic discipline.

**References**


**Author Note:** Dr. Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez (Utah State University) is Interim Editor of the *Psi Chi Journal of Undergraduate Research* and is working closely with outgoing Editor, Dr. Randolph A. Smith.