

Work at the speed of the Body and Don't Manage Professionals

Celebrating ten years of the Journal of Integrated Studies

Editorial

The *Journal of Integrated Studies* (JIS) is 10 years old. Our planning began 12 years ago, and the first issue was published in 2010. The journal is produced by Athabasca University graduate student volunteers and I serve as their faculty coordinator.

~~It's a pleasure to celebrate...~~ [cliché]

~~The MAIS program began the Journal of Integrated Studies in order to~~ [boring!]

~~Ten years ago, MAIS directors...~~ [Summarize the history of the journal at the end]

All good writing involves rewriting, and as academics we know that excellent writing requires the accompaniment of peers who care enough to critique our work. As scholars, we continue to hone our craft and clarify our thinking in the process of submitting our work to journals, receiving comments from reviewers and editors, parking our egos usefully on receipt of that feedback, and ultimately experiencing the joys of sharing our work. We frequently also serve as (visiting) editors and board members for scholarly journals, and all of us have done the work of blind review.

These tasks and the learning they imbue are precisely what the *Journal of Integrated Studies* (JIS) provides graduate students within the MAIS program and beyond¹. Students involved with the journal learn the submission side of the peer-review process as well as the production side.

We are an online journal, which means that in addition to the tasks already mentioned, the volunteers create html and pdf. files of our accepted submissions and produce the journal within Open Journal Software (OJS). They deal with style sheets, coding, software updates, new logos to program into banners, and they run into the all-too-familiar challenges of this academic work: too few reviewers, author hesitation to revise and/or their well-meaning writerly procrastination, and the occasional ornery author.

The JIS team is made of 30-plus student volunteers who are all very busy people, most have full-time jobs, family commitments, and take on heavy course loads. They are spread across Canada and some students live outside of Canada, which means we rarely get to meet in person. In order to do our work, we stay connected via email and a conference call every 6-8 weeks.

As I write about all these realities, I realize with a smile, that our success is indeed cause for celebration (if not joyful amazement).

Managing professionals...Don't!

My role is faculty coordinator. A handful of enthusiastic graduate-student volunteers and I started the journal with generous assistance of IT Systems Coordinator for AU Press, Shubhash Wasti. He knew how to set up OJS for us and the co-editors and assistant editors taught themselves how to use the software.

Over the years, I've worked with hundreds of such willing volunteers. We have produced at least one issue each year and I confess I still do not know how to do the layout of an article and cannot find the publishing button – and even if I could, I would never dare press it. The *Journal of Integrated Studies*' editors are up to the task and anything they don't yet know, they figure out.

My job is to keep an eye on the big picture, ensure our policies and procedures reflect our professional approach, update announcements, create a sense of connection between all of us, bring inspiration (I hope!), appreciate efforts made, recognize needs, and clear any obstacles that students may face. My approach is characterized by what Dutch management guru Mathieu Weggeman calls *stepping back in order to move forward* (2014).

In a book on how to work with professionals, Weggeman (2015) summarizes his message in these succinct, and simplistic-sounding terms: *so, how do you manage professionals? You don't!* This insight from his 2015 book confirmed for me the way that I can best support JIS work is to respect the ability and autonomy of these (developing) professionals. I am most useful to the team by anticipating needs, voicing these, and asking editors whether my hunches are correct.

I work with the intention of applying no pressure; I know that the group I am dealing with are intrinsically motivated learners. The journal is theirs and its success depends on their leadership. I am aware of the dangers of volunteers taking on too much, so I try to anticipate the gaps and recruit on demand. If we need to extend our intended deadlines in order to shepherd a few straggling articles to the finish line, I say: *the idea here is to work at the speed of the body*. This means that we commit to producing one full issue a year, but we don't insist on a second or third, unless that evolves naturally from the process. If this 10th anniversary issue ends up appearing online in early 2021 instead of late 2020, we will bow to that.

As important as deadlines are in publishing, people are more important. Professionals, if we don't "sabotage them... by insisting upon too many rules and procedures instead of trusting" (Weggeman, 2015, p. 9) will get the work done and they'll get it done well.

During a recent video conference call with my colleagues from the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, I brought up the importance of pacing ourselves and not adding more work merely for the sake of increasing production. "I hope we will work in a way that we are not in desperate need of the guidance and counselling knowledge that our authors bring to us!" I said. I saw some nods of recognition and two colleagues followed up with me after the meeting via email, expressing appreciation for my point. That said, even as I made the remark, I noticed that in academia, it seems out of context and counter intuitive. The oversubscribed scholar at such a meeting – where professionalism and success radiate from every corner alongside our warm collegiality – sometimes needs to be reminded. I too need reminding and recognizing this helps me to coordinate the work I do with JIS volunteers.

In celebrating 10 years of this journal, I didn't want to list the great articles that are right here at your fingertips. I didn't want to brag about the award-winning fiction in this issue, because I know the work will speak for itself. I also didn't want to tell readers the whole history of the journal, though you can read the synopsis below. There are (too) many volunteers to thank and feature, but I have featured one in particular who has been with us for more than half the journal's life and plays a substantial role in our success.

What I most wanted to do in this editorial is to add value for those reading and celebrate the work we have done by reflecting on what and how we're doing it.

History and purpose of the *Journal of Integrated Studies*

The idea behind the journal was to create a space where students within the Master of Arts Interdisciplinary (formerly Integrated) Studies (MAIS) could showcase their work. Professors noticed the interesting and promising work that came out of course assignments and in early MAIS meetings, faculty would say, “where might students showcase this work”?

The idea of starting JIS was also to give the students the experience of producing a journal so that those continuing in academia would have that skill under their belt to do so. The journal has created a sense of belonging among students, both in relation to their peers as well as the university.

Over the years we've created a reviewer document, guides for editors, assistant editors, and copyediting, and held several writing contests. We've ‘trained’ hundreds of students to strengthen their writing and editing skills.

Thank you to Dr. Mike Gismondi, Dr. Derek Briton, Derek Stovin, and early MAIS faculty for birthing the idea and to all the volunteers over the years.

Featured volunteer

Diane Mitchnick has been with the *Journal of Integrated Studies* for 7 years in the role of layout editor. She has trained many other layout editors and has been the source of support for co-editors and other volunteers during her many years of service. Diane is a senior program analyst for the City of Calgary and has most recently been involved with data analysis for COVID-19 preliminary predictive analytics. Although most of our volunteers are MAIS students, Diane earned her *Master of Science Information Systems* in 2019 and has been invaluable in sharing her technical skills. She will continue with us in the role of copyeditor. This past year, Diane created a comprehensive document for all roles in how to use Open Journal Software; she generously shared this document with colleagues in the United Kingdom to help with the launch of their scholarly journal.

Reinekke Lengelle, PhD

Faculty coordinator JIS

¹ MAIS and other Athabasca University graduate students can volunteer with us, while we allow submissions from graduate students all over the world who are submitting with an interdisciplinary focus. Some students stay on with us after graduation and help train other graduate students who come to volunteer with us.

References:

- Weggeman, M. C. D. P., & Hoedemakers, C. (2014). *Managing professionals? Don't!: how to step back to go forward: a continental European perspective*. Warden Press.
- Weggeman, M. (2015). *Essenties van Leidinggeven aan Professionals: Hoe je door een stap terug te doen, beter vooruit komt*. Scriptum.