

# 4

## Editing the *Policy Studies Journal* and *Public Administration Review*



David H. Rosenbloom  
and Melvin J. Dubnick

We coedited the *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ) from 1985 to 1990 and began editing *Public Administration Review* (PAR) in 1990, with David Rosenbloom serving as editor-in-chief and Melvin Dubnick as managing editor. PSJ is a quarterly running about 220 pages per issue, whereas PAR is a bimonthly that typically consists of 96 pages. Although there is some overlap in the substance of the two journals, the editorial arrangements and processes have been quite different. This chapter outlines our experiences and provides a record of how the two journals operated and of what we thought we were about.

### Selection As Editors

Sometime in 1983 or 1984, David Rosenbloom received a letter from a search committee of members of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), which publishes PAR, asking him to apply to be editor-in-chief of *Public Administration Review*. At the time, the *Review* had a circulation of about eighteen thousand and was considered the preeminent journal in the field of American public administration. Subsequently, its circulation declined to about fifteen thousand, but its status has remained the same or even increased somewhat. PAR is one of the few public administration journals that enjoys a high ranking among political scien-

tists in the United States and abroad.<sup>1</sup> In response to the search committee's invitation, Rosenbloom drafted a letter of application. It emphasized the desirability of using the editor's gatekeeping role to lend coherence to an otherwise fragmented field—one that is fractured along many lines, including marked differences between academics and practitioners in cognitive styles and intellectual interests. He also stressed the need to upgrade the intellectual quality of materials published in PAR and to maintain greater consistency of quality. At the time, Rosenbloom had no prior experience in editing a journal. Not surprisingly, the position went to someone else.

At about the same time that his application for the editorship of PAR was under consideration, Rosenbloom was asked by Stuart Nagel of the Policy Studies Organization (PSO) if he would like to edit or coedit the *Policy Studies Journal*. In order to do so, institutional backing from the Maxwell School of Syracuse University would be necessary. After gaining assurances from Maxwell dean Guthrie Birkhead that the school would provide the necessary \$3,500 annual subvention and sufficient telephone, copying, graduate assistant, and secretarial support, Rosenbloom agreed to take on the PSJ editorship.

Confusion set in at the outset. The Policy Studies Organization's financial situation required twice the subvention agreed to by the Maxwell School. After a number of discussions, Melvin Dubnick, who was in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Kansas, was brought in as coeditor. He had been literature review editor for PSJ and the *Policy Studies Review* (another PSO journal). Dubnick and Rosenbloom proved intellectually and temperamentally compatible. A mutually satisfactory and durable working relationship (and friendship) was forged.

In 1990, the *Public Administration Review* editorship opened up again. Having taken on the coeditorship of PSJ in part to obtain experience necessary to become a stronger candidate for the editorship of PAR, Rosenbloom again applied. PAR had traditionally used an editor-in-chief and managing editor organizational format. Dubnick, who had moved to Baruch College of the City University of New York in 1988, agreed to join the application as Managing Editor. (In 1992, he moved to Rutgers–Newark.)

As in the case of the Policy Studies Organization, ASPA was very concerned about finances and support. Applicants were required to supply a statement pledging institutional backing, which could take many forms including subsidies and funding for postage, telephone, copyediting, copying, and so forth. Personnel support

could include a reduction in teaching load for the editors, graduate assistance with the *Review*, and secretarial help. The total value of institutional support was expected to be in the range of \$50,000 to \$70,000, much of which would be "in kind" commitment of faculty and staff hours to editing and production. Our joint application was complicated by Rosenbloom's concurrent opportunity to leave his distinguished professorship at the Maxwell School for a similar position at The American University's School of Public Affairs. He agreed to switch positions, and the School of Public Affairs offered to match the institutional backing pledged to ASPA by Syracuse University.

Four pairs of editor-in-chief/managing editor partnerships made ASPA's short list. Each pair was interviewed by the ASPA president, Bill Collins; the president elect, Enid Beaumont; the executive director, Shirley Wester; and ASPA publications staff. Rosenbloom and Dubnick told the selection committee that their objectives would be to:

1. Increase the level of interest in PAR by broadening its focus, which they thought had been overemphasizing narrow concerns with public management technologies, such as computerization and information systems, and underemphasizing such areas as human services, bureaucratic politics, and administrative law. As a field, public administration was enjoying a resurgence among political scientists, but their work was infrequently appearing in PAR. In consequence, PAR was drifting toward being categorized by academics as a nonacademic journal, that is, one devoted to practice only. (Practitioners nevertheless continued to view it as "too academic.") It also seemed to publish a lot of material by a relatively small number of authors who were generally identified as solid citizens of the public administration community.

2. Upgrade and update the methodologies presented in PAR. Although public administration is eclectic in its logics of inquiry, PAR tended not to include articles employing statistical techniques common to contemporary social science, such as regression and time series analysis. Its methodology was lagging, in part, because complicated statistical techniques tended to deter practitioners from reading PAR. Dubnick developed the idea of setting off descriptions of methodology in self-contained shaded boxes within the articles. These "grey boxes" would force authors to be very explicit about their methods and yet allow readers who were uninterested in methodology to skip over them conveniently without losing the logical flow of the article.

3. Include a "Research Notes" section to permit the efficient

transmission of new findings, especially in areas that were well developed theoretically and did not require lengthy introductory reviews of the pertinent literature.

4. Continue to present materials on public administration's intellectual history and core concepts and ideas.

5. Make every effort to enhance the *Review's* appeal to practitioners and to obtain publishable manuscripts from them.

6. Maintain a smooth and quick double-blind submission review system.

When we were selected for an initial three-year term (1991-1993), extendable to five years (1995), we immediately sought to achieve these objectives.

### Transitions

The transitions at both journals were very difficult. At PSJ, we had to set up a new peer review system, develop a strong list of reviewers, and design reviewer forms. We inherited only a few articles that had been accepted for publication. The files on submissions in process were adequate, but some materials were unaccounted for. We were unaware of any computerized manuscript tracking system used by the previous editors. At an early date, Rosenbloom brought a hefty suitcase full of PSJ materials to Dubnick at the University of Kansas in order to put the editing on track.

In all respects but one, the transition at PAR was smoother. We had a longer lead time between becoming editors and the publication of our first issue (from July 1990 to January 1991). Managing Editor Dubnick met extensively with the departing editor, Chester Newland, at the University of Southern California in Sacramento. Newland had a computerized review system in operation that tracked each manuscript, and this made the transition orderly.

The only difficulty, and it was a major one, was that only fifteen of the ninety-six pages for our first issue had been accepted. Other materials were in the pipeline, but we did not know if they would arrive on time or be publishable. Newland preferred to edit without a substantial backlog in order to publish accepted articles quickly. His editing was something of a high-wire act, which he executed with near perfection. We preferred more flexibility and less tension in making each issue's page count. Because we did not want our first issue to appear thin on substance, we spent a

lot of time obtaining reviews, making revisions, and copyediting the accepted articles. It was not until the summer of 1991 that we were able to develop a comfortable backlog.

### Expectations

#### Gatekeeping

In seeking to be editors of PSJ and PAR, we were predominantly driven by the prospect of having an impact on the direction of the policy and public administration fields. Journal editing is a form of gatekeeping. Our key expectation was that as editors we would be able to steer the policy and public administration fields. Steering has had several main dimensions. First, we have sought to publish articles that promote coherence in these fragmented fields. This effort, in turn, breaks down into three major components:

1. Friendliness toward articles about the fields as a whole. For example, we have welcomed meta-analyses, descriptive, and theoretical discussions about the study of public policy and public administration. At PAR, in particular, this approach has been so common that some believe we are spending too much time studying ourselves.

2. Articles that offer, enhance, or seek to build conceptual frameworks for these fields have also been sought. For instance, in the public policy field, the policy cycle framework shows great potential as a conceptual device for integrating and ordering much extant research. Where authors were able to conveniently locate their work in the policy cycle, as agenda setting, policy formulation, policy design, policy analysis or evaluation, or policy revision, we encouraged them to do so. In our view, this prods contributors to think in terms of the field as a whole.

3. We have also been favorable to the publication of articles dealing with the intellectual history of these fields and their core concepts and ideas. At PAR we actively solicit articles on intellectual leaders in the field, and expect to have published several by the end of our initial three-year term. In 1992, we began publishing some articles in Retrospect. These are authors' current reflections on classic articles of high impact that they wrote a decade or more ago.

A second aspect of steering regards quality. Neither the policy studies nor public administration fields have a single methodol-

ogy, or set of methodologies, that can be considered dominant. Efforts to generate knowledge take many paths. We have been dogmatic in one respect only—the logic of inquiry must be clear, correct, and efficient. In an editorial in PAR, Rosenbloom posed the question “How do we know what we know?”<sup>2</sup> Asking authors and members of the public administration community to give serious thought to the logic of inquiry and cognition had an almost immediate salutary effect. Several subsequent submissions dealt directly with the “how do we know” theme and many others mentioned it in conjunction with their methodological approaches. In our view, PAR should publish case studies, articles testing hypotheses with aggregate data, experiments, theoretical discussions, and even descriptive reports on interesting administrative processes. Flawed inquiry, however, must be corrected or rejected.

Third, steering often involves a somewhat tedious effort to encourage authors to revise their manuscripts. Virtually no manuscripts go through our review process at PAR without suggestions for revision. In some cases, these are straightforward—the submissions are too long, they fail to cite an important work, another statistical technique should be tried, they need to be expanded, and so forth. In about 10 percent of the cases, though, the author has an important finding to report or a theoretical statement to make, but fails to convey it effectively. In such instances, the editor-in-chief tries to give very explicit advice on how substantive revisions should be made. The managing editor works closely with authors on questions of methodology. In one case, our recommendations ran to about six single-spaced pages of closely packed text; in others, we successfully urged authors to add material about an important area that was neglected in the original draft. In many instances, the editor-in-chief urges authors of manuscripts with useful findings, but cluttered with already well-worn literature reviews, to recast their work as research notes.

Successfully working with authors toward improvement of their analyses requires a breadth of knowledge about the field. Both editors are authors of successful textbooks in public administration.<sup>3</sup> Although this is hardly a prerequisite to editing a major journal, it is a useful indicator of substantial familiarity with all major aspects of a discipline or field.

Fourth, we have been self-conscious in seeking to bring new ideas into the journals. Unconventional studies and theoretical statements have been welcomed at PSJ and PAR during our editorship. In some cases, this involves taking a risk that what we consider offbeat will be viewed as off-the-wall by others. So far,

we have been more successful than not with unconventional material in the sense that it has stimulated interest and, sometimes, even debate.

Finally, at PAR, our steering involves a concerted effort to publish articles and research notes about public administration in other nations. We view the field of American public administration as seriously limited by failing to learn much from or about experiences in other political systems. In Rosenbloom's view, a tremendous amount of American public administrative thought and practice is culture bound. Such core areas as organization, personnel, budgeting, ethics, and administrative law are often treated as though they do not have counterparts in foreign systems. Comparative studies should help overcome this tendency and offer insights into American practices and options.

#### Dealing with Sponsoring Organizations, Authors, and Reviewers

In our experience, a large part of journal editing involves dealing with the sponsoring organizations, authors, and reviewers. At PSJ we did not anticipate how difficult dealing with the Policy Studies Organization would be. Editing *Policy Studies Journal* was complicated by the fact that each issue contained a symposium over which we had little control. Symposia were commissioned by the PSO and took up approximately 96 of the 220 pages in a typical issue. The symposia were not consistently refereed and varied wildly in quality. Many times—probably most—they were late or required substantial copyediting for such basics as consistent referencing and footnoting. Few issues came out in our five years at PSJ that did not involve long difficulties with PSO and symposium editors and authors.

By contrast, relationships with the American Society for Public Administration have been smooth and efficient. PAR is typeset by the staff at ASPA headquarters and most of our interaction with the organization has been in that context. We also spend considerable time in selecting members for our editorial board. The board consists of approximately forty-five members. Appointments are for one year, with the expectation that members will serve three consecutive terms. One-third of the board rotates off each year. Selections are made with reference to individuals' status in and contributions to the public administration community. Balance is sought with regard to academics and practitioners, region, area of specialized expertise, and a number of social factors, including

gender, age, race, and ethnicity. We also try to ensure that all the top academic public administration programs have at least one faculty member on the board. It is the prerogative of the editor-in-chief to select board members, in consultation with the president of ASPA.

Dealing with authors and reviewers has consistently taken more time than we anticipated. Several authors have called to protest some aspect of our treatment of their work. Either we have held it too long, asked for revisions that they deem inappropriate, or rejected it on insufficiently explicit or reasonable grounds. Although we try to be clear and polite in our rejections, some authors of rejected papers call to let off steam. Many authors are under intense pressure to publish. Some view a close editorial call for rejection as essentially negotiable. Sometimes, the tenure pressures faced by academics lead them to oppose recasting their analyses as research notes. Apparently these are considered less valuable in some institutions (wrongly in our view). From an editorial vantage point, the academic personnel systems that count titles and pages, rather than the impact of ideas and findings, are a tragic perversion and waste of intellectual talent. From time to time, reviewers also have peculiar requests. For instance, they would like to know who wrote a manuscript so that they can get in touch or they would like to phone in their evaluations and discuss them with one of the editors.

In short, our experience suggests that one who harbors the expectation that a journal editor can pore over manuscripts and think through the gatekeeping process, while avoiding the human interface, is off the mark. Editing turns out to be relatively low tech and high touch. The "people process" is extensive.

### Processing Submissions

At both PSJ and PAR, Managing Editor Dubnick took charge of the mechanics of the manuscript review process. For articles and research notes, both journals use an anonymous referee process. Guest editorials are not refereed. Communications may not be, depending on their substance. As mentioned earlier, symposia were not consistently refereed at PSJ, though they are at PAR. PAR has a section called TOPs (Those Other Publications) that reviews government reports and documents. Review essays in this section are currently refereed. Both the book review section and TOPs are

independently edited, with little direction from Rosenbloom and Dubnick. Currently, Irene Rubin of Northern Illinois University edits the book review section. Beverly Cigler of Penn State-Harrisburg is the TOPs editor. Jerry Mitchell, now at Baruch College, was our book review editor at PSJ.

The basics of the review process have been similar at both journals. Authors are required to submit several copies (currently four) of the manuscript to the managing editor and one to the editor-in-chief. Upon receipt by Dubnick, the manuscript is logged in and assigned a journal item number. At least twice a week, editors discuss the submissions and to whom they ought to be sent for review. At PAR, reviewers are given a two-page form on which to respond. One page is for the editors only. It asks the reviewer to rate the manuscript on a number of criteria. The other page is for comments and recommendations to the author. Reviewers are asked to respond within six weeks. Generally, three or four reviewers are selected for each manuscript. In a substantial number of cases, one of the editors also acts as a reviewer. Members of the Board of Editors do a substantial number of reviews, but nonmembers are used as well. During our first year at PAR, we received about four hundred manuscripts and contacted several hundred referees.

Dubnick has adapted a journal-management software package for tracking submissions. Data regarding the author(s), title, and date of arrival of manuscripts are logged in along with information regarding the referees and eventual disposition. These computerized files also contain information on the nature of referee responses and the eventual disposition of the manuscript. They alert us to reviews that are overdue and automatically rate referees on timeliness. By the end of our first year, we were aware that some reviewers were always chronically late and we began bypassing them.

The reviewers' evaluations are sent back to Editor-in-chief Rosenbloom, who makes a copy for Managing Editor Dubnick. Rosenbloom studies the evaluations, reads the manuscripts thoroughly, and decides whether to reject, ask for revisions, or publish as is (the latter is an empty set). He feels free to augment and/or override the reviewers, if he views their points as inadequate. It is easier to do so where the reviewers urge rejection, because authors are apt to complain, perhaps rightly, about getting positive reviews along with a rejection letter. In most cases, however, the reviewers are either divided, uniform in urging rejection, or only moderately positive. It is interesting that our re-

viewers have a greater consensus on what should not be published than on what should be. Rejections are often on the grounds that a manuscript would be of little interest to our readers and therefore PAR is not an appropriate forum for it.

A great deal of time is spent drafting letters urging authors to revise and resubmit their manuscripts to us. This is where an editor can have a great impact on what appears in the literature. Rosenbloom often urges authors to reconfigure their manuscripts, to cite additional works, to be more explicit about their logic of inquiry, and to discuss the implications of their findings or theoretical observations more explicitly.

Many rejection letters are pro forma, but some take a good deal of time as well. The previous editor of PAR viewed the review process as a "floating seminar." Serious authors are entitled to serious discussion and criticism of their work, even if the piece is so flawed as to be irretrievable. Rosenbloom tries to synthesize the points made by the reviewers and his own observations into a clear statement of why we are declining to publish a manuscript. Every effort is made to avoid excessive or harsh criticism, and to encourage authors to submit their future work to PAR. Sometimes we suggest that a manuscript is more appropriate for another journal.

Rosenbloom has been surprised by some authors' reactions to rejections. One author apparently sends almost all his work to PAR first, in hope of gaining acceptance or good advice on how to improve it. He uses us as a review service and views acceptance as an added, but unnecessary, benefit. Another author said she was glad her piece was rejected because she was fed up with her coauthor, who in her view ruined it!

The review process, including thoroughly reading the manuscripts, is very time-consuming. Some weeks it entails a commitment of thirty or more hours.

At PAR, the editors are also responsible for annual awards for the best lead article, general article, article by a practitioner, TOPs essay, and book review. They appoint committees from among the Board of Editors for each award. Awards are presented at the ASPA annual meeting.

### Getting to Print

The publication processes at PSJ and PAR differ in several respects. Initially, in 1985, PSJ was put into camera-ready form by the editors at their respective universities. Each editor was respon-

sible for two issues a year. Later, the journal was typeset by a word-processing service. In the early years, articles had to be retyped or word processed. Later, we began to receive materials on disks. Once the issue was set and corrected, it was sent to PSO headquarters, where materials pertaining to PSO activities, cartoons, and advertisements were added (without our knowledge of their content). It was then sent to a printer in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for printing and binding. Subsequently, it was returned to the University of Illinois for labeling and mailing. This convoluted printing arrangement and the difficulties we had in obtaining symposia on a timely basis contributed to PSJ's tendency to run three to six months late.

By contrast, PAR is typeset and composed currently by John Larkin at the ASPA headquarters. We require all authors to send us hard copies and disks. All articles, research notes, and commentaries are professionally copyedited. Copyediting changes are made on the disks by the staff at The American University or sent back to the authors, who then make the changes. Dubnick works closely with Larkin in writing executive summaries for these materials and in pulling out the methodological discussions to create "grey boxes." They also identify passages that will be displayed as "read outs" within the text. Page proofs are sent to the authors for corrections. These are returned to Larkin, who sets up the entire issue for a final round of proofreading. The editors, copy editor, and a graduate assistant<sup>4</sup> proofread the final copy. Rosenbloom creates a master copy for correction and sends it to Larkin, who completes the publication process. Printing is done by a press in the Washington, D.C., area.

PAR runs on a tight schedule. It is sometimes a few days early in arriving in subscribers' hands, but it has never been late. Proofreading is intensive. Despite the number of eyes that proofread it, typographical errors are apparently an inevitability—and one to which we are alerted by our readers. The editors believe most errors are a result of the authors' inattention to the page proofs.

One of our surprises was that PAR's cover—more specifically, its wrapper—seemed to attract as much attention as its contents. Those concerned about the environment strongly urged us to get rid of the plastic wrapper. Beginning in our second year, we successfully experimented with mailing the *Review* "naked."

There is no doubt that the details of production are very time-consuming. Proofreading, grey boxing, and indexing each volume at the end of the year come in addition to other activities and responsibilities. At times, it is simply impossible to stay abreast of the review and production processes simultaneously. Nevertheless,

we have found that careful attention to details and appearance counts. Dubnick changed the look of both PSJ and PAR, which in both cases generated more interest in their contents.

### Lows and Highs

Editing academic journals is an important, but sometimes frustrating, activity. As described earlier, gatekeeping at a leading journal can potentially have a significant impact on an entire field. Faith in human progress demands that we expect our knowledge to appear limited or even primitive to people of the future. Nevertheless, whatever advances we can help make are clearly worthwhile. At times, though, the lows are substantial.

The low point for both editors was at *Policy Studies Journal*. Rosenbloom's was in the production of early issues, which were typeset on an IBM typewriter with proportional spacing. Corrections were difficult and page numbers were typed separately on small labels, which were affixed when the final copy was ready. The process was very labor intensive and the secretarial staff was overloaded. Dubnick, who took the lead in dealing with the Policy Studies Organization, was constantly annoyed by difficulties in obtaining symposia on a timely basis, their poor quality, and the cartoons placed in PSJ without our knowledge. The major lesson here is that frustration is inevitable if the editors do not fully control the content of each issue and if production technology and staff are unequal to the task.

Although not really a low, at PAR we are under constant pressure to "do something for the practitioners." We were warned by previous editors that PAR is largely produced by academics and consumed by practitioners. The articles' authors and readers are frequently somewhat mismatched. We work hard to connect the two groups. For instance, we urge academics to explain the relevance of their findings or observations for practice. We ask practitioners to be broadly reflective about their practices. However, the gap has been evident for several decades and is likely to continue. Public administration is an applied field—at best a design science like engineering. Practice and theory are bound together, but not smoothly.

The highs come from learning. We read many manuscripts that are on the cutting edge of their fields and subfields. We help shape their final content. Improving a really important manuscript with our review process, our own input, and final editing is clearly an

important intellectual contribution. It is all the better when feedback from our authors and readers is favorable. At PAR, in particular, we have been able to broaden the range of topics analyzed and bring in authors who might otherwise have bypassed the journal. Although we may be naive or pretentious, we genuinely hope to advance the field of public administration through our editing. We are not creating new knowledge, but we believe we can expand the knowledge base of public administration through judicious gatekeeping and by obtaining the revisions we desire from authors. Our hope is that when our term as editors expires we will have played an important role in the field's intellectual development.

### A Concluding Word

Editing an academic journal is a time-consuming, difficult endeavor. In our experience, it cannot be viewed as an essentially clerical task. We take an active role in determining what should be published and how it should be revised, in the appearance of final copy, and in obtaining thoughtful reviews. The opportunity costs are high: each of us has been unable to write articles and books that we would liked to have seen in print by now. But the opportunity is also great. In sum, editors make a difference!

### Notes

1. Ivor Crew and Pippa Norris, "British and American Journal Evaluation," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24 (September 1991): 524–531.
2. David H. Rosenbloom, "How Do We Know What We Know and How Can We Extend What We Know?" *Public Administration Review* 5 (March/April 1991): 95–
3. David H. Rosenbloom, *Public Administration: Understanding Management, Politics, and Law in the Public Sector*, 3rd ed. (New York: Random House/McGraw Hill, 1991). Melvin J. Dubnick and Barbara S. Romzek, *American Public Administration: Politics and the Management of Expectations* (New York: Macmillan, 1991).
4. Rosenbloom has been very fortunate in having the highly competent and dedicated assistance of two MPA students, Dianne Shaughnessey and Beth Cooper.