



# Two Decades of the Journal of Academic Ethics: From the Idea to the Present

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## Introduction

This celebratory editorial is dedicated to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Journal of Academic Ethics (JAE) that focuses on multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research related to various ethical issues and good practice in academia. The scope of the journal concerns original research encompassing research conduct and dissemination, the relationship between and among members of faculty as well as senior leadership, management, and governance. Since its very outset until the end of 2021 over four hundred papers have been published in the JAE. The multiplicity of topics described in the JAE evidences its stability and diverse community of readers. To give more detail how this track record was accomplished, we further elucidate what prompted the establishment of the journal and, where relevant, we present editometric data. Also, we indicate what the JAE should seek in the future to ensure its sustainability.

## Establishment of the JAE

It is over 20 years ago that Deborah C. Poff, the founder and founding editor-in-chief of the JAE, developed a proposal for the introduction of a new interdisciplinary journal with a broad scope which focused on all aspects of academic ethics – from teaching and research through academic administrative ethics and ethics in governance issues. Springer accepted the proposal, and the journal was up and running. The JAE was co-founded with Dr. Alex Michalos, a frequent partner and leader in joint research and publication efforts with Deborah.

Poff believes the journal was ahead of its time in terms of its scope when it was launched. There was a considerable literature at the time (as there still is) on student cheating, including empirical studies and theoretical proposals for strategies to reduce student misconduct in evaluations (e.g. Borkowski & Ugras, 1998). There was also the development of policies and procedures in many countries by governments requiring the

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introduction of research ethics in universities and research hospitals, primarily for faculty seeking research funds from national research funding organisations (e.g. Preston & Woodley, 1991). Empirical studies, as well as literature on philosophical theoretical ethics, were also beginning to grow (e.g. Haenicke, 1988). This was particularly true in respect of biomedical research (e.g. Resnik, n.d.). Less well established were scholarly articles on publication ethics and articles on good governance and ethical leadership by Boards of Governors and senior academic administration. Equally, issues like the representation of authors, peer reviewers, editorial boards and editors did not regularly address issues concerning diversity, equity and inclusivity. Interestingly, Deborah Poff recently published an anthology with Springer on “Corporate Social Responsibility and University Governance”, a topic which might have appeared to be a category mistake (i.e. universities and corporate responsibility) during the early years of the journal. In all of these senses, we have come a long way.

Starting a new journal from the beginning through the first few years is challenging. Authors do not know your journal to submit articles to and, if they do discover it, they are concerned about the credibility and reputation of publishing in a new journal. Consequently, a number of the early editorial boards included well-known scholars with well-established and distinguished publication records. While the JAE has continued to include eminent scholars, the recognisability of scholar names took on less prominence as the reputation of the publication grew on its own merit. Also, members of this reputable community were invited to author articles, particularly in the first year. De George published an oft-quoted article on “Ethics, Academic Freedom and Academic Tenure” in the first year, as did Wilson and Simpson on the ethics of faculty strikes and the faculty of the future respectively.

One more element influenced Poff’s decision to start a journal such as the JAE. She joined the administration of a brand new, small research-intensive university as a Dean, and served for ten years as a Vice-President Academic and Provost. Building a *de novo* university entailed reflection and research on all aspects of the purpose of a university in the twenty-first century. Such thinking evolved into a number of new projects for her, including the development of this journal.

When her twentieth anniversary with the journal approached, including its development, Poff decided to retire – thinking that it was time for new energy, expertise and leadership.

## Editorial Board

The composition of the JAE Editorial Board was dynamic and shifted a few times over the years. It was important to involve scholars with considerable expertise in a specific area of academic ethics, as much originating as possible from different continents and representing gender balance.

Editometric data of 2014–2021 shows that the average number of members on the Editorial Board was thirty-two. From the establishment of the JAE until Autumn 2020, the journal was solely edited by Deborah Poff, editor-in-chief and founding editor, and Alex C. Michalos, founding co-editor (Poff, 2021), both noted above. From Winter 2020, two associate editors joined the JAE – Jennifer Kisamore from the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, USA and Michael Dougherty from the Ohio Dominican University, USA. The former furthered the JAE until the end of 2021, while the latter contributed to editorship of the JAE

until Summer 2021. As the founders and founding editors retired from the JAE a year ago, Poff was very pleased to pass the JAE and the rest of this editorial to her successor, Dr. Loreta Tauginienė, who accepted this considerable role to continue the further growth of the JAE. In 2022, Shiva Das Sivasubramaniam from the University of Derby, UK engaged in the JAE editorship as an associate editor (Tauginienė & Das Sivasubramaniam, 2022).

At present, scholars from eleven countries sit on the JAE Editorial Board, most of whom are from Canada and the USA. Nevertheless, the JAE constantly seeks new highly qualified scholars from different geographical regions to join the JAE Editorial Board. It is apparent that scholars from South America are still underrepresented and scholars from Africa and Asia are scarcely represented. Furthermore, gender balance is not yet sufficiently fulfilled. Currently, over 70 per cent of the editorial board members are male. Therefore, substantial efforts should be made to fill the gap of diversity and inclusiveness.

## Papers

As editometric data of May 2022 indicates, thirty-seven scholars published the top ten most downloaded papers of the JAE, most of them affiliated to academic settings from European countries, such as Finland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, and the UK. The latter is indicated as an affiliation in half of these papers.

The most downloaded paper “Should we Maintain or Break Confidentiality? The Choices Made by Social Researchers in the Context of Law Violation and Harm” by Adrianna Surmiak, had over 29 K downloads in May 2022 (Table 1).

Nine of the top ten most downloaded papers of the JAE are published open access.

## Reviewers

The JAE has a database of around 1,800 reviewers from over the world. The most engaged reviewers serve on the JAE Editorial Board (Table 2).

The JAE used to ask reviewers to share their feedback on the manuscript assigned within 35 days; lately this has been changed to 30 days. Despite that, the first decision on the submitted manuscript takes on average more than a hundred days (viz. 110 days in 2019, 106 days in 2020 and 101 days in 2021). To address this timescale, the JAE will continue to strive for better efficiency in peer review.

## 20 Years at a Glance

As it has been noted, this issue of the JAE marks its 20<sup>th</sup> year of publication. By the time Deborah Poff retired from the JAE, it had grown from a new fledgling journal with a growing scope for research on academic ethics to an established and respected international scholarly quarterly. Certainly, as research and publication practice changes, the need persists, as mentioned earlier, for regular revision of the JAE practice.

**Table 1** The top ten most downloaded papers of the JAE (May 2022)

Title	Number of downloads	Authors
Should we Maintain or Break Confidentiality? The Choices Made by Social Researchers in the Context of Law Violation and Harm	29046	Surmiak (2020)
Secondary Trauma: Emotional Safety in Sensitive Research	10078	Williamson et al. (2020)
Strengthening Ethics: A Faith Perspective on Educational Research	8571	Mogra et al. (2017)
Two Sides of the Coin: Lack of Academic Integrity in Exams During the Corona Pandemic, Students' and Lecturers' Perceptions	8365	Amzalag et al. (2022)
Retrospective Analysis of Plagiaristic Practices within a Cinematic Industry in India – a Tip in the Ocean of Icebergs	7991	Umamaheswaran et al. (2020)
Predicting Students' Intention to Plagiarize: An Ethical Theoretical Framework	7847	Camara et al. (2017)
'I Have to Hold Myself Back from Getting into All That': Investigating Ethical Issues Associated with the Proofreading of Student Writing	6637	Harwood (2019)
Systemic Explanations of Scientific Misconduct: Provoked by Spectacular Cases of Norm Violation?	6040	Huistra & Herman (2022)
Academic Dishonesty or Academic Integrity? Using Natural Language Processing (NLP) Techniques to Investigate Positive Integrity in Academic Integrity Research	5886	Lancaster (2021)
Enhancing the Taxonomies Relating to Academic Integrity and Misconduct	5704	Tauginienė et al. (2019)

**Table 2** The top ten reviewers by completed reviews (May 2022)

Reviewer*	Affiliation	Number of completed reviews
<i>Ken Davey</i>	York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada	49
<i>Phillip Goernert</i>	Brandon University, Canada	37
<i>Loreta Tauginienė**</i>	Hanken School of Economics, Finland	33
<i>Scott Grills</i>	Brandon University, Canada	24
<i>Patrick O'Neill</i>	Acadia University, Canada	21
<i>Mark Israel</i>	University of Western Australia, Australia	18
Stan Shapiro	Simon Fraser University, Canada	18
<i>David Coldwell</i>	University of Witwatersrand, South Africa	16
<i>Susan Clark</i>	Trent University, Canada	14
Thomas Stone	Oklahoma State University, USA	14

\*Names of reviewers in Italic are members of the JAE Editorial Board

\*\* She was engaged in peer review of the JAE manuscripts until the start of her role as an editor-in-chief of the JAE

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