

# Coming to Terms with Electronic Journals

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**Report on the Conference “Refereed Electronic Journals”, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1–2 October 1993.**

On 1–2 October 1993, the University of Manitoba hosted the International Conference on Refereed Electronic Journals. The idea for the conference and subsequent planning and organization were the responsibility of an inter-disciplinary committee of the University. Funding toward the conference was provided by the Medical Research Council of Canada, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Though there have been several earlier conferences on the still-developing phenomena of electronic publishing, this conference was distinctive in at least four ways.

First, the focus was specifically on the network publication of refereed research journals. Secondly, the size of the conference attendance was limited to permit a “single-stream” program in which all those attending could participate in the same sessions. The intention was that all those attending the conference could acquire and interact with a common body of information. Thirdly, this conference had the specific aim to promote the idea of a consortium of universities, colleges and learned societies to encourage and develop proper use of the Internet for research publication across all disciplines. Fourthly, though the conference was international in scope, the fact that the conference was a Canadian initiative subsidized by the Canadian research granting councils indicates a desire to ensure the participation of the Canadian academic community in future development of the Internet for research publication.

The fundamental concern behind the conference was that the international academic community should recognize both the potential of network publication and a responsibility to take an organized and active role in developing this new publication medium. The Internet will certainly be developed by governments and commercial enterprises. Unless the academic community takes more seriously the need to participate in developing the network for research publication, the particular needs and concerns of

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scholars will be served only as they are seen to coincide with commercial or governmental purposes.

To make more specific the stance and premises of the organizing committee, behind all the planning for the conference lay certain commitments, a *credo* of sorts: that academic merit should be the main consideration in scholarly publication, that scholars should accept a responsibility to help shape how research gets published (instead of leaving the matter to commercial interests), that the network provides an outlet worth developing for research publication, that the academic community should work together to take advantage of this new medium, and that modern universities and learned societies in particular have a special responsibility to help guide the mature use of the network for serious academic publication (including the legitimization of network publication on a par with traditional paper publication).

Conference sessions were all planned on the basis of these concerns. The opening session was devoted to examining the possibilities of network publication and to airing some critical questions about the matter as well. Ann OKERSON (Association of Research Libraries) gave an overview of the basic questions involved in considering the development of electronic journals, and Sandra WOOLFREY (Wilfrid University Press) expressed caution about how much actual reduction in costs electronic journals might offer. Two sessions were devoted to "Practical Implementation" matters, beginning with presentations by Jean-Claude GUÉDEON (Université de Montréal) on editing the refereed, Internet-published journal *Surfaces*, Lorrin R. GARSON (American Chemical Society) and Edward J. HUTH (American Association for the Advancement of Science), reporting on steps being taken in the sciences toward development of network journals. John BLACK (University of Guelph), Timothy D. STEPHEN and Teresa HARRISON (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute) dealt with questions about the distribution of and access to electronic journals. Stephen and Harrison provoked some controversy in their allegations that academic slowness in taking up referred journals was attributable in part to a reluctance of established academic power structures.

"Issues of Quality" were dealt with in session four, with Steven HARNAD (Princeton University) and David RODGERS (American Mathematical Society) describing how peer review operates on the network, and James GARDNER (Vice-President, University of Manitoba) speaking on the future reception of electronic publications in the evaluation of faculty members. A major emphasis of this session was the advantage of the network in providing for quick "post-publication" peer review and critique of published research.

Legal issues (e.g., copyright) were addressed in session five, with presentations by Jennifer BANKIER (Dalhousie University), Denis MARSHALL (Queen's University), and Robert FRANSON (University of British Columbia). There was some disagreement as to whether existing copyright laws could adjust to the electronic age or would need some special revisions, with Marshall arguing for changes to restore a balance in law in favor of access to scholarly information for non-profit uses.

In sessions six and seven, David BRAILSFORD (University of Nottingham) described his use of *Adobe Acrobat* as a very sophisticated formatting program allowing network journals to publish much more complex material and in a much more pleasing

format than is possible in ASCII format. Witold KINSNER (University of Manitoba) illustrated advanced experiments with image and sound compression, affording a glimpse of developments just over the horizon.

The concluding session was comprised of a presentation by Larry HURTADO (University of Manitoba) urging an international collaborative effort by learned societies and universities to develop policies and standards for research publication on the network, and to work for full legitimation of the network for the publication of high-quality research throughout the academic community. A vigorous discussion followed, with most speakers enthusiastic about the proposal. The organizing committee has agreed to provide conference attenders with further information to assist them in presenting the proposal of such a consortium to academic bodies they represented.

During the conference there was an exhibition area open featuring information on some of the latest in computer technology. Particularly relevant was the exhibit on text, image and sound processing and compression.

Abstracts of the conference presentations are presently available via anonymous FTP on the University of Manitoba server ([ftp.cc.umanitoba.ca](ftp://cc.umanitoba.ca)). Full conference proceedings and other notes are being prepared for FTP access as well. The directory "e-journal" has been set up for these materials. Refer to the file "README" in this directory for updated notices on these materials. Abstracts are available in the sub-directory "abstracts" under the "e-journal" directory. The conference secretariat was the University of Manitoba Institute for the Humanities ([umih@ccu.umanitoba.ca](mailto:umih@ccu.umanitoba.ca)).