

Editors' Notes

EDITORS' REPORT SEPTEMBER 2010

The JOURNAL's new coeditor, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and I are the first set of coeditors who have only experienced administration of the JOURNAL using the Manuscript Central website. I came aboard two years ago just after Phil Hoffman, Jeremy Atack, and their assistants Sue Isaac and Sabrina Boschetti had finished the daunting task of making the transition to web-based administration of manuscripts. Friends ask me whether the editorship has been especially burdensome. Having the website structure for the JOURNAL has made the administrative burdens easier than anticipated.

Jean-Laurent and I would like to salute not only the team of people who made the transition but also all of the preceding editors who slogged through the pre-Manuscript Central phase. As many of us have experienced, the technological changes in writing and publishing over the last three decades have greatly increased the ability of people to produce publication-ready manuscripts. When I started graduate school, the IBM correcting electric typewriter was the gold standard for typing manuscripts. Publications were typeset. By the time I submitted my first paper to the JOURNAL, most of the analysis had been done with punch cards on mainframe computers. I finished the rewrite of the paper using a new IBM clone computer with Multi-Mate software on 5 ¼ inch floppy disks. All of the correspondence was done by regular mail with the natural delays involved, and publications were still being typeset.

By the mid-1990s I can remember Joel Mokyr as editor fuming to me about the process of shifting to using computer software to typeset the articles. You can imagine the various gesticulations, epithets, and changes in vocal pitch involved in Joel's animated description. Email improved communication so much that the editorial assistant could live in a separate city from the editor. When the editorship transferred from Gary Libecap at Arizona to Gavin Wright at Stanford, Sue Isaac at Arizona stayed on as Gavin's assistant and maintained that role for the Americas office until I replaced Jeremy Atack in July 2008.

Thank you to all of those previous editors who crawled uphill through the snow, through desert windstorms or blowing typhoons to pull all of those submissions out of the post. They risked paper cuts as they stuffed envelopes and mailed manuscripts to referees. Editors and referees developed back strain as they hauled the papers around in their briefcases. The editors then had to edit by hand and the authors had to read their doctor-like scribble while making corrections. Finally, the papers and graphs went off to the typesetters who risked eyestrain and injury to set the type and print the JOURNAL.

The benefits from web-based editorship are clear, but some challenges arise. The website sometimes changes referee's passwords at random and occasional .pdf files get corrupted. Email correspondence is increasingly caught in junk mail filters and some emails wander off into the Ethernet. An occasional referee takes the view that journal websites are the bane of scholarship.

The technological changes have increased our ability to handle submissions more quickly and with fewer errors. Our main focus, however, is on publishing top scholarship. The new technologies have essentially raised the stakes in terms of sophistication of statistics and econometrics, as computers and software can now perform estimations in a few seconds that took weeks 20 years ago and were impossible 40 years ago. Similarly, theoretical models have become more complex. Yet, the key to good scholarship goes well beyond technical wizardry. The technique

is no better than the fundamental insights that drive the use of the techniques, the understanding of the historical background and institutions, collection of data of high quality, and the author's ability to offer a clear narrative that offers new understanding of an important issue. The JOURNAL has had a great deal of success in publishing the type of high quality work I describe.

Following in the footsteps of prior editors, Phil, Jean-Laurent, and I have focused heavily on working with authors to make their papers clearer to readers with both technical and non-technical backgrounds. This process has led to multiple revisions in some cases as we work with authors to tighten the narratives, tie the graphs and tables into the text better, reduce jargon, and emphasize more strongly the major insights in the articles published. D. McCloskey wrote an excellent piece on "Economical Writing" that originally appeared in *Economic Inquiry* and has been published in revised form in the second edition of the book with the same title. We highly recommend it to prospective authors because it will make you think more about how to help the reader understand your paper. Some key tips include: eliminate roadmap paragraphs; include tables and figures only if you write sentences in the text that highlight the key points made in them; use words rather than symbols and acronyms as you use key concepts throughout the text; describe the magnitude of the effects; and put your findings in context by comparing them to related findings in other historical or modern settings.¹

Phil, Jean-Laurent, and I have been and continue to be fortunate to work with excellent people. Sabrina Boschetti at Caltech has been our Production Editor for the past two years and will continue in that role. Brendan Livingston continues as my assistant at Arizona. We have a very strong editorial board. Term limits force us to lose three excellent members: Carol Shiue, Steve Haber, and Marc Weidenmier. We add Ken Pomeranz, Peter Rousseau, Bill Summerhill, and Melissa Thomasson for the next four years. After four years as a book review editor for the Eastern Hemisphere, Alan Miller is stepping down. Alan made the job look so easy that Phil decided to take his place. Paul Rhode continues as book review editor for the Americas office. Mark Zadrozny, our liaison in the Cambridge University Press Office, has moved to other duties after providing several years of excellent service. Gillian Greenough has just replaced Mark this summer and has already made several suggestions that are improving the editing and distribution process. Subscriptions will soon include access to the online version of the JOURNAL as well as the hard-copy version.

The number of submissions to the journal in Figure 1 in has rebounded from last year. Phil reported a decline in new submissions from the all-time peak of 158 in 2007/2008 to 97 in 2008/2009. Table 1 shows a recovery to 127 with 50 in the Americas office and 77 for the Rest of the World Office. The distribution of topic areas in Table 1 has evened out a great deal. A Herfindahl index for topics has fallen from 1460 in 2006/2007 to 926 in 2009/2010. The share of political economy articles fell from around 25 percent to 5 percent in 2008/2009 but recovered some to 14 percent after Phil's clarion call for more political economy in his editorial report last year. After two years with a 20 percent share, labor topics have returned to a 14 percent share this past year. The share of papers on economic growth has bounced around a 10 percent share throughout the period. The shares for public finance, agriculture, and demography have risen from very low levels in 2006/2007.

¹ McCloskey, "Economical Writing" and *Economical Writing*.

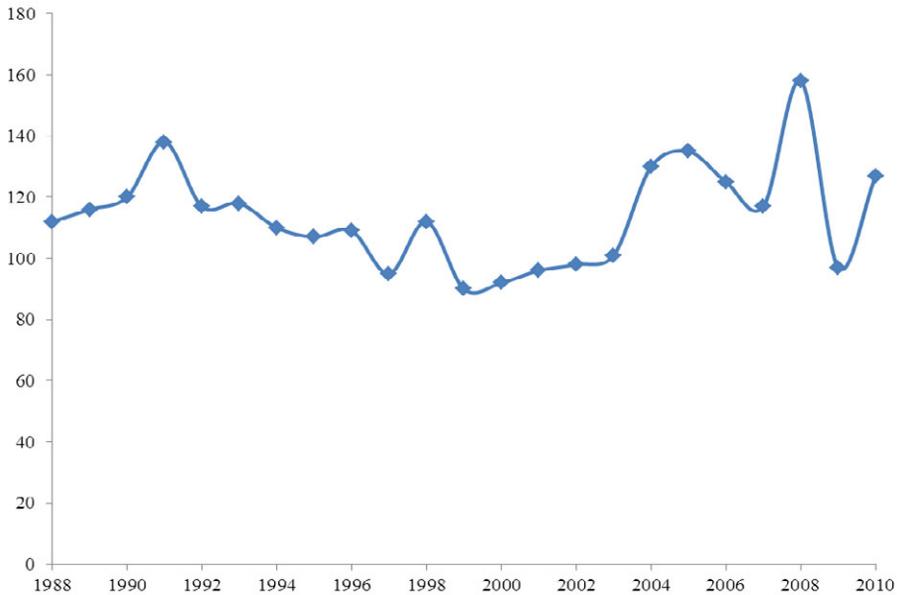


FIGURE 1
NEW SUBMISSIONS IN YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 1988–2010

The coverage of regions in Table 2 has evened out some at the expense of the United States and Canada. After several years with a 40 percent share of papers, the share on the United States and Canada has fallen to 32 percent, and a significant number of those papers make comparisons between North America and other parts of the world. The share of papers on Africa has risen, as the shares from Asia and Latin America fell. Great Britain has surged as a topic, due in part to surge of papers by Steve Broadberry comparing productivity in Britain to several new places.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries tend to account for about 70 percent of the papers in Table 3. The share falls as the coverage shifts further back in time or forward into the twenty-first century. There is one caveat about all of these statistics. The editors classified the papers up through 2007–2008, and the classifications have been chosen by the submitting authors since that time. After various attempts to apply regression discontinuity design, I did not gain much insight from the change in survey methods.

To put the response-time statistics in Table 4 in context, here are some insights as to how we have been operating the JOURNAL through Manuscript Central. When the paper is submitted, we check for membership in the Economic History Association or the payment of the journal submission fee for nonmembers. A lapsed membership or nonpayment of the submission fee will slow the process because we can do nothing with the paper until the fees are paid. We also do our best to check that there is no information in the submitted files that identify the author. Sometimes the information is hidden. The Word software (under Prepare then Properties) often has information on the owner of the software that needs to be cleansed. Once the fees are paid and the paper cleansed of author information, we try our best to contact referees within a week, and we give them a deadline of eight weeks. We send reminder emails a week before the

TABLE 1
ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY WORLD AREA BROKEN DOWN BY TOPIC
JULY 2007–JUNE 2010

Topic	July 2007–June 2008		July 2008–June 2009		July 2009–June 2010	
	North & South America	Rest of the World	North & South America	Rest of the World	North & South America	Rest of the World
Agriculture	4	4	3	2	5	5
Demography	1	2	4	2	1	9
Growth	3	10	4	8	3	10
History of thought	1	1	0	0	0	0
Industry	10	6	3	2	2	3
International trade	3	9	6	4		
finance					4	6
Labor	20	11	10	11	10	8
Money and macro	6	6	5	3	5	5
Political economy	14	14	0	5	5	13
Private finance	3	7	7	1		
capital markets					6	5
Public finance	2	0	2	1	1	6
Technology	6	3	2	3	2	5
Urban and regional	2	0	2	1	3	1
Other	4	6	3	3	3	1
Total	79	79	51	46	50	77

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. The totals equal the number of new submissions received because a paper is classified in only one topic category. Until March of 2008 the North American Editorial Office was responsible for articles on the United States and Canada; thereafter it took charge of submissions on Latin America too. In the latest year the Americas office had 67 total submissions, 51 new and 16 resubmitted. The office for the rest of the world had 64 total submissions, 46 new and 18 resubmitted.

TABLE 2
REGULAR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY REGION 1 JULY–30 JUNE

Region	Submissions			
	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
Africa	1	1	4	8
Asia	12	17	5	7
Australia and New Zealand	2	2	0	2
Eastern Europe/Russia	4	7	2	7
Great Britain	16	12	8	22
Latin America	9	9	8	7
Middle East	2	6	3	6
Non-Spanish speaking Caribbean	0	0	1	3
United States and Canada	38	72	38	51
Western Europe	44	43	26	46
Not applicable	5	9	2	3

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. Totals exceed new submissions because a paper can be classified as pertaining to more than one region.

TABLE 3
REGULAR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY PERIOD 1 JULY–30 JUNE
2007–2008, 2008–2009, AND 2009–2010

Period	Submissions		
	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
Twenty-first century	2	1	3
Twentieth century	67	30	61
Nineteenth century	81	38	69
Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries	18	15	27
Pre-seventeenth century	13	11	15
Not applicable or unknown	30	2	3

Note: The numbers include new submissions only. Totals exceed submissions because a paper can be classified as pertaining to more than one period.

TABLE 4
DECISION LAGS IN DAYS

Year	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median
All submissions				
2004/2005	1	366	112	104
2005/2006	1	338	97	92
2006/2007	1	215	88	92
2007/2008	1	216	72	81
2008/2009	30	193	88	92
2009/2010	13	162	91	90
New submissions only				
2004/2005	1	260	100	90
2005/2006	1	338	94	90
2006/2007	1	215	89	111
2007/2008	1	216	72	80
2008/2009	31	176	87	91
2009/2010	20	162	94	91

Note: The acceptance figures include new submissions and resubmissions except when the resubmitted papers have already been accepted conditionally. Until March of 2008 the American Editorial Office was responsible for articles on the United States and Canada; thereafter it took charge of submissions on Latin America too.

report is due, the day it is due, and then after it is due. We also try to contact people directly if these don't work. Our goal is to have a decision back to the author within 90 days. Table 4 shows that our average and medians for the past two years are right around 90 days. We have tried to shorten the time frame for articles that we expect to be rejected. We tend to take more editorial time on papers in the revise and resubmit stage because we they are more likely to be accepted. This is one reason why the statistics for all articles are roughly the same as for new submissions even though we shoot for a six-week turnaround time with referees on resubmissions. Compared with other fields in economics, the JOURNAL's turnaround time is very fast. Economic history journals in general have been good about this and we have a friendly competition going with other economic history journal editors to try to maintain these turnaround times.

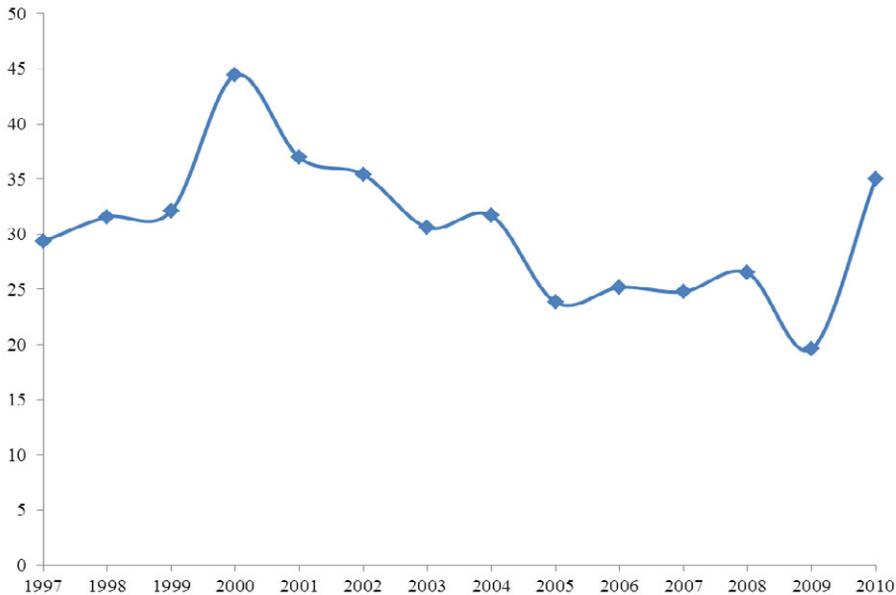


FIGURE 2
PUBLICATION RATE, 1997–2010

Notes: The publication rate for 2010 is the refereed number of articles and notes published between July 1 and June 30 of 2010 as a percentage of the number of new submissions between July 1 and June 30 of 2009, and similarly for prior years. Presidential addresses and book reviews are not included. In years prior to 1997, the June issue of the *JOURNAL* was devoted to publishing papers presented at the annual Economic History Association meetings, so the meaning of publication rates differed.

A new measure of publication rates is shown in Figure 2. The reported acceptance rates in the past two editorial reports were artificially low due to an understatement in acceptances in the website reporting software. The new measure is the number of refereed papers and notes published in the current year divided by the number of papers submitted in the previous year. The publication rate peaked at 45 percent in 2000 and fell to a low around 20 percent in 2009. The number of refereed articles and notes published does not change much from year to year, so the publication rate typically fluctuates in the opposite direction of the number of new submissions. As a result, the low publication rate in 2009 in Figure 2 is associated with the spike in the number of new submissions in 2008 in Figure 1, and the rise in the 2010 publication rate resulted from the sharp drop-off in submissions in 2009.

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REFERENCES

- McCloskey, Deirdre. "Economical Writing." *Economic Inquiry* 23 (April 1985): 187–222.
 _____. *Economical Writing*. Second revised edition. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999.

Referees for the year were:

Ran Abramitzky	Latika Chaudhary
Robert Allen	Gregory Clark
Lee J. J. Alston	Karen Clay
Manuela Angelucci	Philip R. P. Coelho
Pol Antras	Andrew Coleman
Jeremy Atack	William J. Collins
Gareth Austin	George Colpitts
Mark Bailey	Metin Cosgel
Martha Bailey	Dora Costa
Robert Bates	Leonor Costa
Bas van Bavel	Lee A. Craig
Cliff Bekar	Joseph Cullen
Daniel Benjamin	Guillaume Daudin
Andy Bielenberg	Joseph Davis
Howard Bodenhorn	Jan De Vries
Vicki Bogan	Marc Deloof
Dan Bogart	Tracy K. Dennison
Jan Bohlin	John Devereux
Michael Bonner	Mark Dincecco
Michael Bordo	Jeremiah Dittmar
Maristella Botticini	Mauricio Drelichman
Leah Platt Boustan	Brandon Dupont
George R. Boyer	Alan Dye
Fabio Braggion	Michael Edelstein
Stephen Broadberry	Rodney Edvisson
John Brown	Jari Eloranta
Carsten Burhop	John C. Emery
Judith A. Byfield	Stanley Engerman
Bruce Campbell	Steven A. Epstein
Cameron Campbell	Bogac Ergene
Ann Carlos	Chris Evans
Leonard Carlson	Robert Fairlie
Albert Carreras	James Farr
Linda K. Carter	Giovanni Federico
Y. Cassis	Emanuele Felice
Benjamin Chabot	James Fenske
Eric Chaney	Mark Fey

Alexander Field	Julian Hoppit
Price Fishback	Rick Hornbeck
Marc Flandreau	William Horrace
Juan Flores	Sara Horrell
Caroline Fohlin	Michael Huberman
Jon Fox	Greg Huff
Gerald Friedman	Jane Humphries
Wantje Fritschy	Douglas Irwin
Jeffrey Furman	Lakshmi Iyer
Oscar Gelderblom	David Jacks
James Given	Robert Jensen
Sun Go	Clemens Jobst
Dror Goldberg	Ryan Johnson
Brent Goldfarb	Joost Jonker
Jack Goldstone	Brooks Kaiser
Barry Goodwin	Mark Tooru Kanazawa
Regina Grafe	Shawn Kantor
George W. Grantham	Efraim Karsh
Farley Grubb	Ian Keay
Ola Grytten	Wolfgang Keller
Timothy Guinnane	Lane Kenworthy
Bishnupriya Gupta	Zorina Khan
Sonam Gupta	Carl Kitchens
Theresa Gutberlet	Daniel Klerman
Stephen Haber	Sverre Knutsen
James Habyarimana	John Komlos
Barbara Hahn	Morgan Kousser
Michael Haines	Eduard Kubu
Gillian Hamilton	James Kung
Christopher Hanes	Timur Kuran
Zeynep Hansen	Nicholas Kyriazis
C. Knick Harley	Sumner La Croix
Scott Harrington	Pedro Lains
Mark Harrison	Naomi R.Lamoreaux
Jac Heckelman	Chris Lamoureux
Jessica Hennessey	Markus Lampe
Eric Hilt	John Landers
Philip Hoffman	Chulhee Lee

James Lee	Wallace Oates
Frank D. Lewis	Jonathan Ocko
Peter Lindert	Sheilagh Ogilvie
Hakan Lobell	Lee Ohanian
Trevon Logan	Lars Fredrik Oksendal
Jason Long	Alan L. Olmstead
Debin Ma	Martha L. Olney
Thomas N. Maloney	Kim Oosterlinck
Daniel Marcin	Kevin O'Rourke
Robert Margo	Alastair Owens
Martine Mariotti	Les Oxley
Ben Marsden	Sevket Pamuk
Joseph R. Mason	Randall Parker
Fabrizio Mattesini	John Parman
Nicholas Mayhew	Karl Gunnar Persson
Anne E. C. McCants	Toni Pierenkemper
Rachel M. McCleary	Stephen Pincus
Deirdre McCloskey	Florian Ploeckl
Robert McGuire	Kenneth Pomeranz
Richard McKenzie	Keith Poole
Christopher Meissner	Gilles Postel-Vinay
Victor Menaldo	Svante Prado
Jacob Metzger	Leandro Prados de la Escosura
Philippe Minard	Stephen Quinn
Kris James Mitchener	J. Mark Ramseyer
Carolyn Moehling	Roger Ransom
Joel Mokyr	Thomas G. Rawski
Petra Moser	Armando Razo
Bernardo Mueller	Angela Redish
Sharon Murphy	Paul Rhode
John Murray	Hugh Rockoff
Aldo Musacchio	Nicolas Rodger
Suresh Naidu	Jonathan Rose
Larry Neal	Joshua L. Rosenbloom
Tom Nicholas	Jean-Laurent Rosenthal
Andrew Noymer	Philipp Rossner
Nunn Nathan	Elyce J. Rotella
Alessandro Nuvolari	Peter Rousseau

Ariel Rubin
Jared Rubin
James Schmitz
Lennart Schon
Andrew Seltzer
Carole Shammas
Carol Hua Shiue
Richard Sicotte
Morris Silver
Hugo S'Jacob
Philip Slavin
Robert W. Slenes
Kenneth A. Snowden
Todd Sorensen
David Stasavage
Richard H. Steckel
Jochen Streb
William Summerhill
William A. Sundstrom
Nathan Sussman
Richard Sylla
Ellis Tallman
Peter Temin
Melissa Thomasson
Ross Thomson
David Throsby
Giovanni Toniolo
John Treble
Werner Troesken
Michael Turner
Nuno Valerio
Patrick Van Horn
Francois Velde
Nancy Virts
Hans-Joachim Voth
Daniel Waldenstrom
James Walker
John Wallis
Kirsten Wanderschneider
Marianne Ward
Warren Weber
Marc Weidenmier
Barry R. Weingast
Thomas Weiss
Robert Whaples
David C. Wheelock
Eugene White
Jeffrey G. Williamson
Susan Wolcott
Nikolaus Wolf
R. Bin Wong
Geoffrey Wood
Noam Yuchtman
Bartolome Yun-Casalilla
Peter Zeitz