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.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North &amp; South America</td>
<td>Rest of the World</td>
<td>North &amp; South America</td>
<td>Rest of the World</td>
<td>North &amp; South America</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Money and macro</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<td>Africa</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Australia and New Zealand</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>Middle East</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Spanish speaking Caribbean</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>United States and Canada</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>51</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</table>

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

TABLE 3
REGULAR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS BY PERIOD 1 JULY–30 JUNE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Twenty-first century</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Twentieth century</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nineteenth century</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventeenth and eighteenth centuries</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-seventeenth century</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable or unknown</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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.
Editors’ Notes

Figure 2
PUBLICATION RATE, 1997–2010

Notes: The publication rate for 1910 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.

PRICE V. FISHBACK, University of Arizona, Tucson

REFERENCES

Editors’ Notes

Referees for the year were:

Ran Abramitzky
Robert Allen
Lee J. J. Alston
Manuela Angelucci
Pol Antras
Jeremy Atack
Gareth Austin
Mark Bailey
Martha Bailey
Robert Bates
Bas van Bavel
Cliff Bekar
Daniel Benjamin
Andy Bielenberg
Howard Bodenhorn
Vicki Bogan
Dan Bogart
Jan Bohlin
Michael Bonner
Michael Bordo
Maristella Botticini
Leah Platt Boustan
George R. Boyer
Fabio Braggion
Stephen Broadberry
John Brown
Carsten Burhop
Judith A. Byfield
Bruce Campbell
Cameron Campbell
Ann Carlos
Leonard Carlson
Albert Carreras
Linda K. Carter
Y. Cassis
Benjamin Chabot
Eric Chaney

Latika Chaudhary
Gregory Clark
Karen Clay
Philip R. P. Coelho
Andrew Coleman
William J. Collins
George Colpitts
Metin Cosgel
Dora Costa
Leonor Costa
Lee A. Craig
Joseph Cullen
Guillaume Daudin
Joseph Davis
Jan De Vries
Marc Deloof
Tracy K. Dennison
John Devereux
Mark Dincecco
Jeremiah Dittmar
Mauricio Drelichman
Brandon Dupont
Alan Dye
Michael Edelstein
Rodney Edvisson
Jari Eloranta
John C. Emery
Stanley Engerman
Steven A. Epstein
Bogac Ergene
Chris Evans
Robert Fairlie
James Farr
Giovanni Federico
Emanuele Felice
James Fenske
Mark Fey
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James Lee
Frank D. Lewis
Peter Lindert
Hakan Lobell
Trevon Logan
Jason Long
Debin Ma
Thomas N. Maloney
Daniel Marcin
Robert Margo
Martine Mariotti
Ben Marsden
Joseph R. Mason
Fabrizio Mattesini
Nicholas Mayhew
Anne E. C. McCants
Rachel M. McCleary
Deirdre McCloskey
Robert McGuire
Richard McKenzie
Christopher Meissner
Victor Menaldo
Jacob Metzer
Philippe Minard
Kris James Mitchener
Carolyn Moehling
Joel Mokyr
Petra Moser
Bernardo Mueller
Sharon Murphy
John Murray
Aldo Musacchio
Suresh Naidu
Larry Neal
Tom Nicholas
Andrew Noymer
Nunn Nathan
Alessandro Nuvolari
Wallace Oates
Jonathan Ocko
Sheilagh Ogilvie
Lee Ohanian
Lars Fredrik Oksendal
Alan L. Olmstead
Martha L. Olney
Kim Oosterlinck
Kevin O’Rourke
Alastair Owens
Les Oxley
Sevket Pamuk
Randall Parker
John Parman
Karl Gunnar Persson
Toni Pidenkermer
Stephen Pincus
Florian Ploeckl
Kenneth Pomeranz
Keith Poole
Gilles Postel-Vinay
Svante Prado
Leandro Prados de la Escosura
Stephen Quinn
J. Mark Ramseyer
Roger Ransom
Thomas G. Rawski
Armando Razo
Angela Redish
Paul Rhode
Hugh Rockoff
Nicolas Rodger
Jonathan Rose
Joshua L. Rosenbloom
Jean-Laurent Rosenthal
Philipp Rossner
Elyce J. Rotella
Peter Rousseau
Editors’ Notes

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