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JHR

The Journal of Human Resources

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To: Friends of the *Journal of Human Resources*

From: Bill Evans
Editor

Date: September 10, 2010

Re: Overview of editorial process at *JHR*

This brief memo outlines the editorial review process for manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Human Resources*. It contains some basic facts about the volume, disposition, and expected turnaround time on manuscripts and explains why we no longer use a double blind reviewing system.

I. General overview

As we note on our web page, the *JHR* is a quarterly journal *that publishes academic papers using the best available empirical methods, principally in the field of economics. Our portfolio of papers includes work in labor economics, health economics, the economics of education, development, poverty studies, and the analysis of social safety net programs. The journal is open to papers using a wide variety of statistical techniques. The journal publishes about 32 articles year.*

The Journal is published by the University of Wisconsin Press and the editorial office is housed in the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin. For more information about IRP, please see <http://www.irp.wisc.edu/>.

The journal is available online through HighWire and older issues are available in JSTOR.

The editorial board is listed on the letterhead to the left. The managing editor for the Journal is Jan Levine Thal who has been with the journal for 25 years. The editorial board work tirelessly for the journal and their efforts for the journal and the profession are to be commended.

II. Initial submissions

Submissions to the journal must comply with the guidelines outlined on the journal web page. Starting with papers submitted October 1, 2010, articles will no longer be double blind and authors are requested to include a title page with authors' names and affiliation. The rise of Google has made the double-blind process obsolete. We will, however, continue to keep reviewers anonymous.

Starting about three years ago, the editorial office noticed a large increase in manuscript length. Because we publish so few articles per year, the increased page length forced us to reduce the number of articles per year which we found unfortunate. As a result, about a year ago, we imposed a hard limit on all initial submissions: 45 pages in length (including footnotes, references, appendixes, and any other supplementary material) with the text double spaced, 12 point type, one-inch margins,.

Since August of 2006, all papers to the journal are submitted online. Once the managing editor has verified that a submission complies with the submission guidelines, the article is sent to the editor. At that point, the editor either desk rejects the manuscript, sends the manuscript out for reviews, or asks one of the coeditors to handle the manuscript. Manuscripts sent to coeditors can either be desk-rejected or sent out for reviews. Our use of desk rejects is discussed at length below.

III. Submission Volume

Figure 1 is a time series of the new monthly submissions to the *JHR* (solid line) and a 12-month moving sum from July 2004 through June 2010. A number of trends are worth noting. First, prior to August of 2006, submissions to *JHR* totaled about 300 to 330 a year. Soon after we went online, there was a large spike in manuscripts with submissions peaking in mid-2007 at about 460/year. Submissions dropped sharply in the fall of 2007 and early spring of 2008 as the new *AEJ* journals started taking submissions. After this time however, submissions have once again risen. In the 12 months ending June 30, 2010, our editorial team has handled 433 new submissions. Since the journal is still publishing the same number of articles per year as a decade ago, the rise in submissions has meant a dramatic decline in acceptance rates. As we note below, only 8 percent of first submissions are asked to provide a revised manuscript.

IV. Disposition of Articles

Table 1 contains data on the disposition of initial submissions to the journal during 2009. These are all "complete spells" in that all authors for these articles have received a decision on their first submission. In 2009, we received 430 manuscripts. Of these, 294 or 68 percent were desk rejected by the editor or one of the coeditors. About two-thirds of these are desk rejected by the editor and the remaining manuscripts are desk rejected by the coeditors.

Our use of desk rejections is higher than at most journals but we believe the process is justified based on two facts. First, the scarce resource in the journal production process is refereeing time and as a result, we want to use this resource for those manuscripts that the coeditors believe have the greatest likelihood of success. Second, given the volume of submissions and the fact we publish only 32 articles a year, it makes little sense to delay decision on articles that are unlikely to make it through the review process. The desk-rejection process will obviously generate errors – some good articles will get passed over while maybe some weaker articles will be sent out for reviews. This also requires more work from the coeditors because they are responsible for making a preliminary decision about the paper. However, we believe this procedure helps avoid needless delays and is beneficial for authors, the journal, and potential referees.

Of the manuscripts submitted in 2009, 136 or about 32 percent were sent out for review. Of these, about a quarter of the authors were asked to submit a revised version of the manuscript. As the final rows of Table 1 illustrate, of those manuscripts submitted in 2009, only 8.4 percent were asked to provide a revised version of their paper.

V. The Speed of the Review Process

In Table 2, we provide some data about the time to first reports for articles submitted in 2009.

Of the 136 articles sent out for review, the mean time to first review is three months (94 days), half received a report in under 3 months (87 days), 75 percent of authors receive reports in a little less than four months (114 days) and fully 90 percent receive reviews in a little more than five months (163 days). We hope to reduce further the average time to first reports primarily by reducing the right-hand tail of the distribution.

Manuscripts that are desk-rejected naturally received reports in a much shorter time period, with the median time to completion being four days. The 90th percentile time to response for desk rejections is 11 days and virtually all articles not sent out for review receive a notice in 14 days.

Combining these two categories, of the 430 manuscripts submitted in 2009, the mean time review is 34 days, but 50 percent of all manuscripts receive a decision in one week. This is again driven exclusively by our high use of desk rejections. Overall, three-quarters of all manuscripts receive first reports in two months (59 days) and fully 90 percent of all manuscripts receive first reports in a little over three months (106 days).

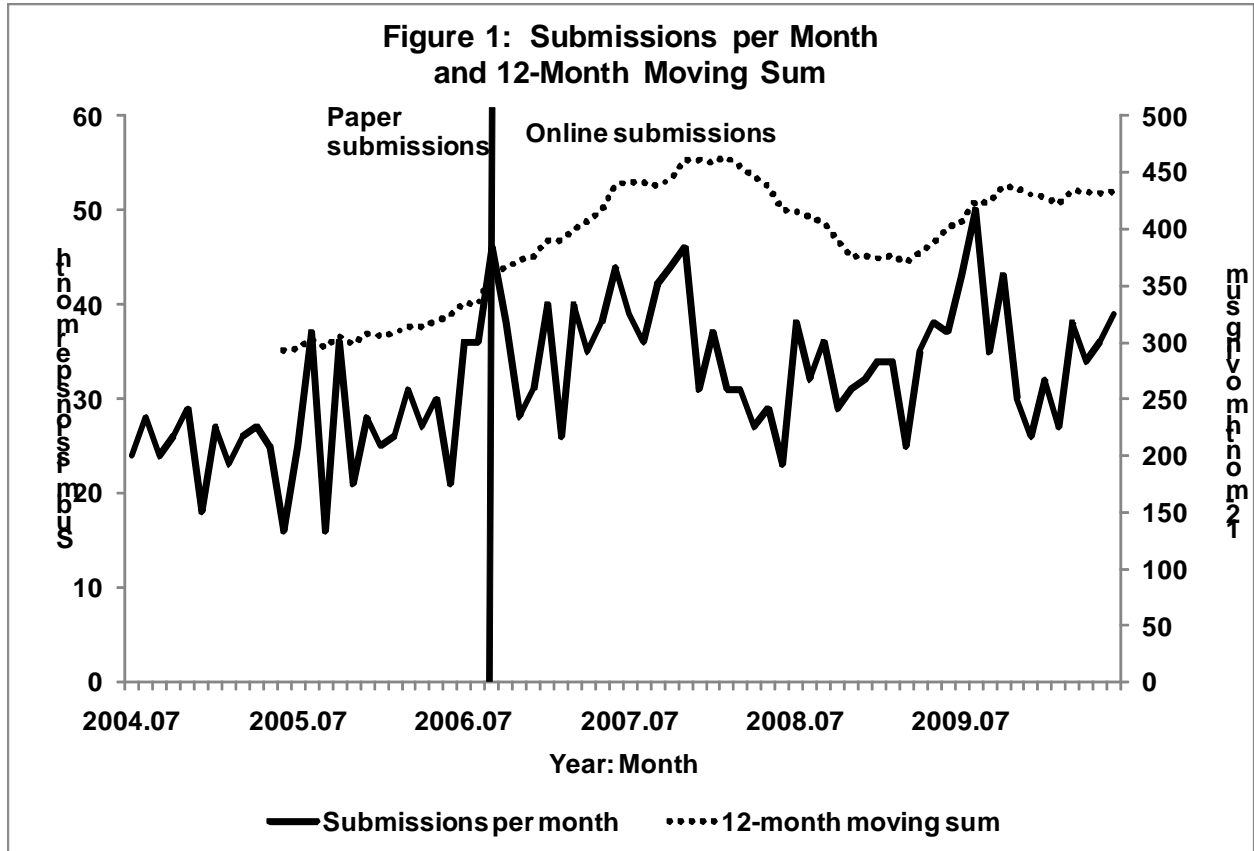


Table 1
 Disposition of Articles Submitted During 2009

	Number	Percent
Submissions	430	
Desk rejected	294	68.4%
Sent onto referees	136	31.6%
Of those sent onto referees	136	
Rejected	100	73.5%
Revise and resubmit	36	26.5%
Of all submissions	430	
Rejected	394	91.6%
Revise and resubmit	36	8.4%

Table 2
 Duration of Time to First Review in Days

Subgroup	No.	Mean	Percentile of Distribution			
			25 th	50 th	75 th	90 th
Articles sent out for review	136	94.1	61	87	114	163
Desk rejects	294	6.7	2	4	7	11
All submission	430	34.3	3	7	59	106