

# RESEARCH CONNECTION

## Hype or real threat: The extent of predatory journals in student bibliographies

By Rainer Schira, Acting University Librarian, &  
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### Why this research is important

Since 2012, thousands of potentially predatory journals have erupted all over the internet. While there is no agreed upon definition of what a predatory journal is, they commonly pretend to offer peer-review, pretend to have reputable journal editors, aggressively solicit articles through email-spamming, and lie about their inclusion in commonly used research indexes like *Web of Science* or *PubMed*. The main purpose of predatory journals is to make money by charging article submission fees. Article submission fees are a common practice for reputable open access journals, but predatory journals do not provide any of the benefits that reputable journals do. Unsuspecting authors can find themselves in a position where their

### What you need to know

For this project, we studied if students use potentially predatory journals in their research assignments. We also wanted to know if students are aware what predatory journals are and how students conduct their research.

articles have not actually been improved through peer-review and where their research has very little impact—as predatory journals are often not found in reputable indexes. On the flip side, authors can choose to publish a substandard article specifically in a predatory journal to get a quick citation necessary for promotion. If a researcher's CV is not properly checked during a promotion procedure, the author can be promoted despite doing poor research. As well, these substandard articles can be found with a Google search, and unsuspecting students may accept their worth uncritically.

Much has been written about what makes a journal predatory, the importance of understanding how to spot and avoid predatory journals (including lists of journals and publishers to avoid), who publishes in predatory journals and why, and how many predatory journals are found in commonly used library research databases. No one yet has asked if students use them in their bibliographies for their university research assignments.

## How the research was conducted

Our initial research was done in the winter of 2017 with a follow-up study in the fall of 2019. In both cases, we received permission by Brandon University professors, whose assignments included a research paper, to ask their students to provide us with their assignment bibliographies.

The initial 2017 study also included a questionnaire of faculty members to find out what they knew and thought about peer-review, open access journals, and predatory journals. The follow-up 2019 study also included focus groups to gain a better understanding of what students have to say about their research process, peer-review, and predatory journals.

## What the researchers found

In 2017, we collected a total of 245 bibliographies, including 2,359 citations. Of the 1,485 citations to journals in these citations, five were found to cite journals from potentially predatory journals and publishers. We have gathered 249 bibliographies for our 2019 study but have not evaluated them at this point. We also conducted focus groups with 12 students. Again, their thoughts and insights have not yet been analyzed.

## How this research can be used

Determining if students know about and use predatory journals in their assignments can help a university decide whether it should spend more effort educating students about this issue.

## About the researchers

H. Rainer Schira is currently the Acting University Librarian. He has been at Brandon University since 2001 and has spent most of his time helping students and faculty learn how to do library research more effectively.

He has taught medieval history courses, coached the Brandon University women's soccer team for six years, is a runner and triathlete, and an avid board gamer.

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## Keywords

Predatory publishing, open access publishing, academic libraries, bibliographic analysis

## Publication based on this research

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