

Editorial

Laws Editorial

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My life's work has positioned me in two diverse worlds—one in science and one in law [1]. I publish in both fields, and the traditions are very different. Law journals typically have narrow readerships, principally those in the legal academy. The law review tradition, particularly in North America, is student edited, non-peer reviewed, and characteristically long and detailed. Law libraries often spend large portions of their budgets on journal subscriptions, which they store in scarce space.

This is beginning to change, albeit slowly. Legal researchers often place their articles on-line before publication, for example, in the Social Science Research Network (SSRN). Even the most well established law reviews are expanding their web-presence, moving to shorter, more focused essays, and some law journals—often in sub-specialties of law—have turned to the peer review process.

In contrast, all high-quality scientific journals engage in rigorous peer review as the gold standard of excellence. Science articles are usually short and well focused, following a familiar formula of background/context, results, and discussion/analysis. A few leading scientific journals have wide circulations and readership—many reaching beyond a national audience to a broad international distribution. Most scientific journals are subscription and paper based. This too is beginning to change as relatively new scientific journals move to an on-line, open access approach, competing with older, more traditional journals.

What both law and science journals have in common is that they are usually expensive and, therefore, inaccessible to a large swath of the global population—particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They are also out of reach for many poorer researchers, academic institutions, and civil society even in developed countries. Another common feature of both scientific and legal journals is the lengthy publication process and long lead-time between submission and publication. Ideas that were fresh and original when written can appear out-dated and less impactful when finally published.

The founding idea of the journal *Laws* is to cut through the myriad disadvantages of traditional legal publishing—in part borrowing from the best ideas in scientific journalism and in part improving upon them. Consider these advantages of publishing in *Laws*—advantages that accrue both to authors and readers. First, *Laws* uses the rigor of the peer review process, which has long been a benchmark of high quality in science and related fields. The peer review process separates original, rigorous scholarship from scholarship that does not warrant publication in a top journal. It also improves manuscripts, as authors benefit from the review process, with ideas for better writing and more rigorous justification of claims.

Second, *Laws* can overcome critical cost barriers to wide dissemination. Influential papers will be free and fully available to all readers worldwide. This will make it possible for a far more extensive readership, a more international audience, and more impactful scholarship.

Third, *Laws* will overcome non-cost barriers to a wide readership, such as the need to print, deliver, and store paper journals. This not only causes delay, but also harms the environment and occupies precious library space.

Fourth, *Laws* will publish and disseminate articles rapidly to ensure their timeliness. By getting articles out quickly it will be more possible to influence key debates and social movements in policy and civil society, as well as in the academy—not just the legal academy but well beyond.

Finally, *Laws* will have the flexibility to publish a variety of scholarly contributions, ranging from the longer traditional law review article to shorter, focused essays. This will enable authors to choose the best form for their message and make the journal more lively and engaging for readers.

For all these reasons—high quality peer review, low cost, electronic medium, rapid publication and dissemination, and flexibility of style—*Laws* should take its place quickly as a leading and influential voice in legal scholarship and policy development.

Content and Scope of Scholarly Articles

Most law journals cater principally to a national audience. Those that have a wider ambition often focus on subjects of transnational concern such as trade, human rights, or arms control. *Laws* is decidedly a journal that crosses national boundaries covering a wide range of topics, methodologies, and disciplinary approaches. The subject areas of *Laws* are intentionally diverse, encompassing public and private law, as well as national, comparative, and international law. Scholarship is welcomed in areas as diverse as administrative and constitutional law, torts and contracts, through to property, business, and corporate law.

Laws also embraces diverse, rich methodologies, including normative, theoretical, doctrinal, empirical, and thick description. It is similarly multi-disciplinary, hoping to attract the best scholarship, for example, in history, philosophy, and sociology of law. The journal is interested in the study of legal systems and institutions such as the judiciary, legislature, and administrative agencies, as well as governance—both national and global.

Launching a new law journal in a sea of existing journals (many of extremely high reputation and quality) is daunting; but the advantages of on-line, open access make it vital to do. The founding vision of *Laws* is not simply technological but also transnational. When most law journals were founded, informational technology and globalization were not the forces that they are today. In our new global

environment, *Laws* should attract the finest scholarship and have a broad influential readership. I invite you to join me, and the editorial board, in this new venture.

References

1. Gostin, L.O. From a civil libertarian to a sanitarian. *J. Law Society* **2007**, *34*, 594–616.

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