ESPO’s Guide to Becoming a Journal Reviewer

By Adrian N.S. Badana, MPH, CPH

A successful university student’s experience should allow exposure to many opportunities that enhance an individual’s knowledge and skills in his or her chosen field. One of those experiences can include serving as a reviewer for a journal.

As a student or emerging scholar, you can gain the unique experience of critiquing papers from a reviewer’s perspective. By reviewing a journal article, you can improve your own writing skills and learn more about the peer-review process. You can also gain valuable insight into how a reviewer may critique your manuscripts, thereby helping you when you prepare to submit your work for publication. Reviewing journal articles can also mean that you are one of the first to read current research in your specific field and stay up-to-date on new methods and studies.

GSA’s journals The Gerontologist; Innovation in Aging; The Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences; and The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences provide emerging scholars and students with the opportunity to review submitted manuscripts either as a reviewer-in-training along with a faculty mentor or as a novice reviewer. A novice reviewer serves as a third reviewer in the peer review process, and his or her comments are given full consideration in editorial decisions. Once novice reviewers have completed at least two reviews, they become regular reviewers for the journal. For more information, email GSA Associate Director of Publications Megan McCutcheon at mmccutcheon@geron.org.

Other peer-reviewed journals also extend the reviewer experience to students. In many graduate programs, students work alongside their advisors as ad hoc reviewers during the journal peer-review process. If you are interested in acting as an ad hoc reviewer, you should consult your advisor or mentor. It is important that you review for a journal that aligns with your personal research interests. For example, a student who is interested in sociology may want to review for The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, while a student who is involved in biological research may prefer to review for The Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences. To reap the benefits of the reviewer experience, the articles reviewed and the chosen journal should reflect the research focus and interests of the student or emerging scholar.

If you are considering reviewing an article, here are a few tips:

• Assess if the manuscript is a good fit for the specific journal. You can read the journal’s instructions to authors and browse prior issues to see what types of articles the journal tends to publish.
• Separate your feedback into major and minor issues for revision.
• Consider if and how the manuscript contributes to the field or adds new evidence.
• Evaluate the clarity of the manuscript and if the findings are logically presented.
• Provide both constructive feedback and positive comments to the authors where applicable.
• Finally, decide if the manuscript should be rejected, accepted, or resubmitted with either major or minor revisions.

Overall, the opportunity to serve as an ad hoc reviewer for a peer-reviewed journal can offer valuable insight to any student who participates. Working alongside an advisor or primary professor can provide an excellent mentorship experience when students collaborate with a faculty member during the peer-review process. Serving as an ad hoc reviewer is also a great CV booster and shows others in the field that you have experience in reviewing research. Having reviewer experience on a CV will be beneficial when applying to positions in academia or in the research field. Your contribution to the peer-review process demonstrates that you have some background in analyzing other scholars’ research in addition to conducting your individual research.

Continued from page 1 – Isaacowitz Tapped as GSA’s Next Psychological Sciences Journal Editor

Isaacowitz said. “I am extremely honored to have been selected as the next editor of this prestigious and important journal, and look forward to helping highlight the critical work being done in this research area.”

Isaacowitz is currently a professor of psychology and the director of the Lifespan Emotional Development Lab in the Psychology Department at Northeastern University. His research focuses on the effects of aging on emotion regulation and social perception — using diverse methods including stationary and mobile eye tracking — and is funded by the National Institute on Aging (NIA), the National Institute of Mental Health, and the Velux Stiftung.

His work has appeared in journals such as Psychological Science, Psychology and Aging, Emotion, The Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences, and Social Psychological and Personality Science. He has served as an associate editor at Psychology and Aging and at Emotion. Isaacowitz previously served as chair of the NIA Behavioral and Social Sciences of Aging grant review panel, and currently is chair of the National Institutes of Health’s Social Psychology, Personality and Interpersonal Processes review panel.

Isaacowitz was an undergraduate at Stanford and completed his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, and spent 10 years at Brandeis before moving to Northeastern. He is a fellow of GSA, the American Psychological Association, the American Psychological Society, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, and the Society for Experimental Social Psychology. He has received GSA’s Margret M. and Paul B. Baltes Foundation Award in Behavioral and Social Gerontology, as well as the Springer Early Career Award from the American Psychological Association’s Division 20.