

Geographical Research: Editors' Report 2009

Introduction

In 2010, Phillip O'Neill (Editor in Chief, Western Sydney), Clive Forster (Flinders) and Brian Finlayson and Wayne Stephenson (Melbourne) will take over editorial responsibility for *Geographical Research* from Arthur Conacher (Western Australia) and George Curry and Roy Jones (Curtin) who have edited the journal since 2001.

The journal was founded in 1963 and thus will produce its landmark 50th volume during their term of office. This report will therefore focus on some longer term issues.

Editorship

Until 1996, all former editors (and other IAG office bearers) were listed in each issue of *Australian Geographical Studies*. For the record, the complete list to date is as follows:

1963-6 T. M. Perry

1966-72 J.L. Davies

1973-4 M. McCaskill

1974-6 M. McCaskill and P. J. Smailes

1977-8 M. McCaskill

1978-82 J.M. Powell

1983-6 P.J. Rimmer, D.K. Forbes and R. Wasson

1986-8 J. E. Hobbs and D. J. Walmsley

1988-92 E. Young and R. W. Galloway

1992-7 M. McCaskill and R. P. Bourman

1998-2000 S. Gale, R. Loughran and H. Winchester

2001-2009 A. Conacher, G. Curry and R. Jones

2010-2 P. O'Neill, B. Finlayson, C. Forster and W. Stephenson

Whenever there has been more than a sole editor it would seem that an attempt has often been made to have representation from both physical and human geography, but there does appear to be a degree of gender imbalance in the foregoing list.

Publication and Publishers

For 34 years, two issues of *Australian Geographical Studies* were published per year/volume. The size of the journal was increased to three issues per volume in 1997 and to four issues in 2005. By December 2009, 112 issues of *Australian Geographical Studies/Geographical Research* will have been published, 32 (29%) of them by the outgoing editorial team.

For much of its existence, printing and publication of the journal was handled by the IAG, with either the Treasurer or a designated IAG Council member acting as the journal's Business Manager. In 1997, the Institute commenced a publication arrangement with Blackwell. Initially this arrangement was with Blackwell's main centre of operations in Oxford. Responsibility for production and management of the journal was transferred to Blackwell Asia in Melbourne in 2002. In 2008, a merger/takeover between Blackwell and Wiley took place and, in October 2009, the production (but not the management) of the journal will be moved to Wiley's Singapore base.

The IAG's current contract with Wiley Blackwell comes to an end next year. It is encouraging that several international firms have expressed an interest in publishing *Geographical Research*. Negotiation of a new contract, taking into account the potential academic and financial benefits for the IAG, will therefore be a major issue for Council and the new editorial team to consider in the coming year.

Listings and Rankings

Although *Australian Geographical Studies* had formerly been ISI listed, this status had been lost by the time that the current editorial team were appointed, allegedly for failure to publish in a timely manner. Given that the relative status of journals has become an increasingly important academic issue in recent years, the regaining of ISI listing became a major focus of our second (2004-6) and third (2007-9) editorial terms. Advice from both our publishers and the ratings agency indicated that, in any application for reinstatement, it would be desirable if the journal could demonstrate how *Australian Geographical Studies*' remit differed from that of the already ISI listed *Australian Geographer*.

Accordingly, and following discussions with Council, the editorial team undertook a rebranding/rebadging exercise which was designed to emphasise the journal's role as a discipline wide, a national academic organisation owned and a regionally, if not globally, focused publication in the mould of *AAAG* and *TIBG*. This exercise coincided with the increase to four issues per year in 2005 and involved not only the retitling of the journal as *Geographical Research* (with the subtitle *Journal of the Institute of Australian Geographers* being given greater prominence), but also a redesign of the cover and the format of the journal and a reorganisation of the Editorial Board.

The Board was reconstituted as a specifically national body and this was complemented by the establishment of an International Editorial Advisory Panel made up of several former Board members from North America and Europe together with a number of leading scholars from Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and Africa, thus emphasising the journal's regional and global significance.

Following this rebranding, a successful application was made for ISI listing. The journal is currently being assessed for its first ISI ranking in 2010. This will be based on the numbers of 2009 citations of articles published in 2007 and 2008 in *Geographical Research*. Data for the January to July period indicate that, if current citation levels are maintained for the remainder of the year, the journal should record an impact factor of a little over 1 and would thus be ranked in the middle of the 51 geography journals assessed for the Social Science Citation Index.

More recently, the federal government has engaged in a series of journal ranking exercises as part of the ARC's ERA (Excellence for Research in Australia) initiative. *Geographical Research* is ranked in both Cluster 1 (Physical, Chemical and Earth Sciences – under 0406 Physical Geography and Environmental Geoscience) and Cluster 4 (Social, Behavioural and Economic Sciences – under 1604 Human Geography). In the draft rankings in 2008 the journal was rated A in both clusters.

An ERA trial is currently being conducted on Clusters 1 and 2 only and subsequent rankings have been developed for these two clusters. Disturbingly, *Geographical Research* has been reclassified as C in Cluster 1 as part of this exercise. However, these nominally final rankings have been altered several times already and anecdotal evidence from Curtin's Office of Research and Development indicates that there is ongoing disquiet over many of the current Cluster 1 and 2 rankings across the university sector. Nevertheless this has to be a matter of concern for both the IAG and Australian Physical Geography. It would be desirable if the ranking of the journal in Cluster 4 could be monitored (and, ideally, if the ranking in Cluster 1 could be rectified) by the Institute in the upcoming full ERA exercise.

Both the ISI and the ERA journal rankings are likely to be accorded even greater weight in the future. The amount and quality of the copy submitted to a journal will become ever more closely linked to its ranking and status. This will render the challenge of enhancing the quality and impact of *Geographical Research* all the more significant.

Technological Changes - Production

In 2000, at Perth airport, the current editorial team took charge of several boxes of manuscripts and correspondence from their predecessors, together with a number of sheets of A3 graph paper on which the progress of submissions to the journal was charted manually. Visuals were characteristically couriered in hard copy to the publishers in Oxford, as were the proofs to the editors in Perth.

Early in our term, we established an Excel spreadsheet system of manuscript tracking on an ftp site and, more gradually, communication of virtually all of the journal's content has moved to an electronic format, though some contributors and referees still provide material in hard copy. Wiley-Blackwell has appraised us of their on line manuscript submission and refereeing system (currently called Scholar One). However, the current editors felt that a decision on its use by *Geographical Research* should be left to Council and to the incoming editorial team. The use of Scholar One, Early View and of publisher-based copy editing services all have financial implications for the Institute and these will need to be considered by Council and the incoming editors in the course of both our ongoing dealings with Wiley-Blackwell and in the upcoming contract negotiations.

In 2008, *Geographical Research* began posting accepted and copy edited papers on Wiley Blackwell's Early View website. This now contains all the articles which will appear in our final issue in December 2009 and material which the incoming editorial team will allocate for publication in the course of 2010.

Technological Changes – Circulation

As Table 1 indicates, over our term of office the nature of institutional (and, to a large extent, individual) access to the journal has been transformed by the shift to an electronic format.

Table 1. Australian Geographical Studies/Geographical Research subscription data 2000 –2008

	2000	2001	2007	2008
Library subscriptions (total)	307	301	221	219
Library subscriptions (electronic only)	-	-	102	117
Electronic consortia subscriptions	178	254	2080	2244

(Source: Publisher's Reports 2001, 2008)

Individual library/institutional subscriptions have been declining steadily and, in 2008, electronic only subscriptions exceeded those for hard copy plus electronic for the first time. This shift, however, is insignificant when compared with the number of libraries/institutions now gaining consortia access to the journal. These characteristically involve agreements by which groups of institutions negotiate electronic access with a publisher to groups of journal titles. Consortia access widens the potential circulation base, particularly in the developing world, since countries with a Gross National Income per person of under \$US3500 receive "free or very low cost access". The nature, speed and magnitude of these shifts should be taken into account in the upcoming contract negotiations.

Electronic access also permits tracking of article use – or at least of article downloads. These grew rapidly from under 10 000 in 2003 (the first year for which data are available) to a peak of 37 140 in 2007. There was a slight decline to 36 531 in 2008 which, the publishers contend, can be ascribed to problems associated with the migration of material from the Blackwell to the Wiley InterScience platform (e.g. blocking on Google, failure to send out electronic tables of contents, outdated links on library catalogues, etc.) The publishers expect growth to have resumed in 2009 and the incoming editors/Council should monitor this closely.

With regard to the downloading of individual articles, it is interesting to contrast the number of downloads for the top (701 and 145) and the tenth (313 and 34) articles in 2008 and 2001 respectively. Continued monitoring of the most cited and downloaded articles should assist the incoming editors in their decisions on what to publish, what to publicise and, perhaps, on which theme issues to accept or commission.

Journal Content

As we have indicated above, the most important judgments on the quality of any journal's content are made externally and are reflected in such measures as citation indices and national rankings. A journal's most important quality control instrument is its pool of referees, a very large group which has become increasingly international and interdisciplinary over the course of our editorship. We are most grateful for their input at a time when work pressures on academics have been growing exponentially and we will publish a final list of referees from our period of editorship in the first issue for 2010.

In addition to quality, however, there is a need to obtain a sufficient quantity of copy and to provide a balance in the nature of the journal's content that ensures that *Geographical Research* has relevance to, and ideally beyond, both the Institute's diverse membership and the discipline. The majority of the articles published during our term of office have, of course, been individually submitted papers and editors have only limited control over the intradisciplinary balance of the material submitted to them. However, we have used and built on two practices adopted by our editorial predecessors, namely the publication of theme issues or part issues and of international reviews in an attempt to maintain an ongoing supply of material of interest to readers from across and beyond the Institute and the discipline. While both of these initiatives tend to increase citation rates, we have also continued with them for less materialistic reasons. These have included responding to contemporary issues, such as rural youth migration, addressing topics which span the discipline, such as the water crisis, and obtaining international perspectives on matters of importance to the nation, such as bushfire, or the discipline, such as the RQF/ERA.

Two of the most successful theme issues, as measured by citations and downloads, related to the Brisbane IGU Congress. The June 2006 issue on 'Regional Responses to Global Changes' was prepared by the editors for the Congress, while the June 2007

issue on 'Indigenous Peoples' Knowledges and Rights' was offered to the journal by the newly established IGU commission in this field and was made up of papers from its inaugural sessions at the Brisbane meeting.

See Appendix A for an indication of the trends in both the human/physical and the Australian/international balances of the journal's content over our editorial term.

Quantity has proved to be less of a challenge for us than balance. Notwithstanding the increase to four issues per volume in the middle of our term, there has always been a sufficient flow of sufficiently good copy. Currently there are 12 papers on the Early View website, most of which will appear in the December 2009 issue. They will shortly be replaced on Early View by a further batch. Another six papers, from the Economic stream of the 2007 State of Australian Cities conference, are currently being copy edited and proofed for inclusion as a (part) theme issue in March 2010. For marketing purposes we hope to have these, and the guest editorial, available on Early View before the SOAC 2009 conference is held in late November

It is difficult to provide precise statistics on acceptance and rejection rates. Significantly fewer papers are rejected outright than are simply not returned to us when moderate or major revision is recommended. Equally we have received acceptably revised versions of some papers several years after they have been returned to the authors. It is therefore difficult to ascertain when a final status can be allocated to a given submission. As a guide, however; of the papers 'live' on our tracking system as of September 2009, 17 are already on or are close to appearing on Early View, 10 are currently under evaluation and the remaining 14 seem very unlikely to progress to publication unless major - and in most cases very belated - revisions are made to them.

Conclusion

We are leaving *Geographical Research* in safe hands. We trust that we are leaving the incoming editors with both a healthy journal and a healthy flow of copy. But, particularly as Australian academia moves into the ERA era, we ask the members of the Institute to ensure - through their own efforts as authors and referees - that the quality, quantity and balance of both the journal and this flow of copy are at least maintained and preferably enhanced.

The Editors, 25/9/09

Appendix A

Changes in the composition and authorship of papers since 2000

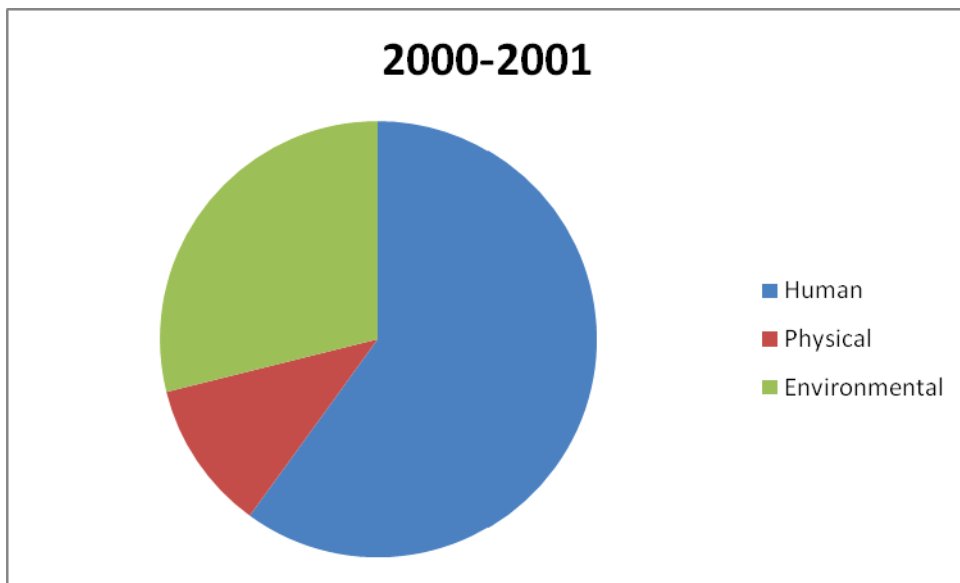


Figure 1a. Proportions of human, physical and environmental geography papers in 2000/01

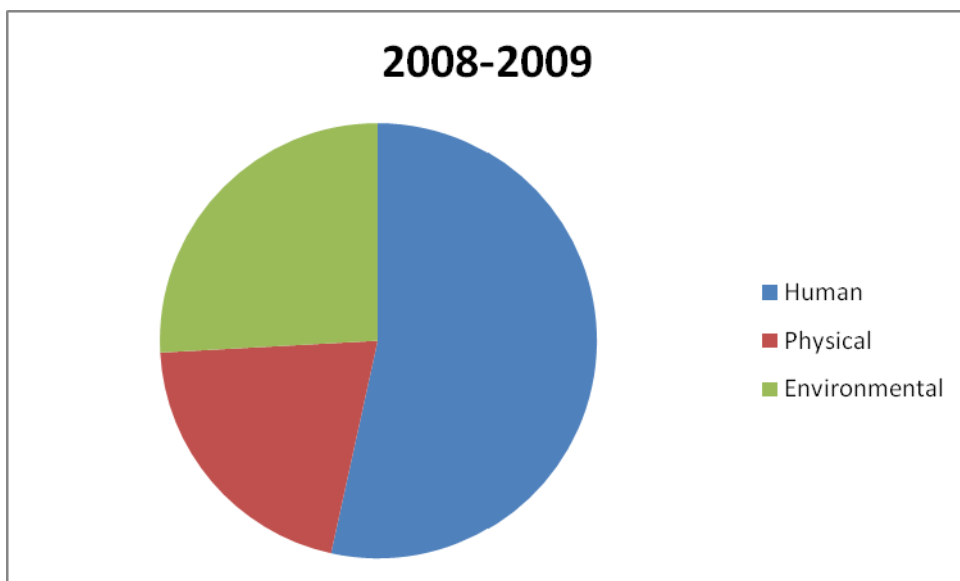


Figure 1b. Proportions of human, physical and environmental geography papers in 2008/09

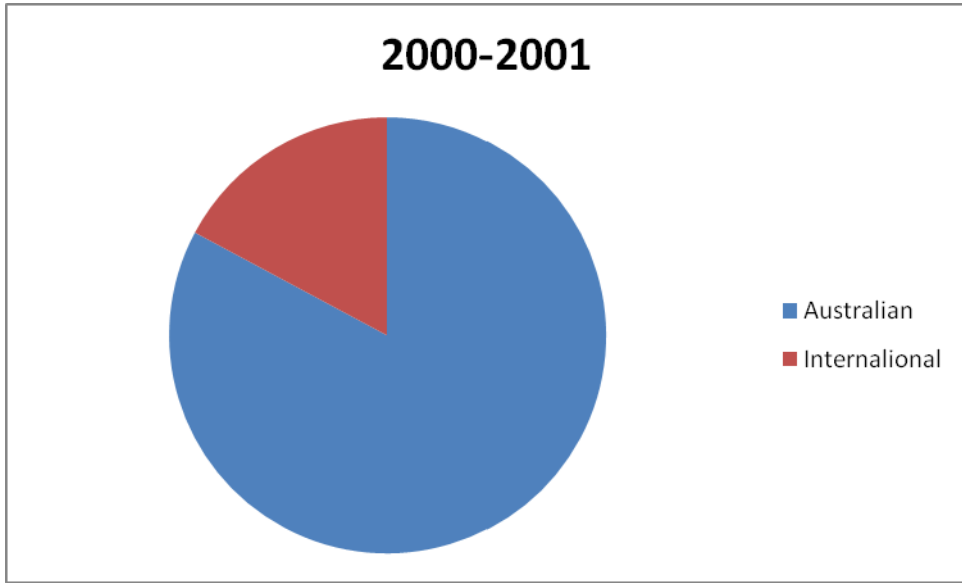


Figure 2a. Proportions of all authors affiliated with Australian or overseas institution in 2000/01

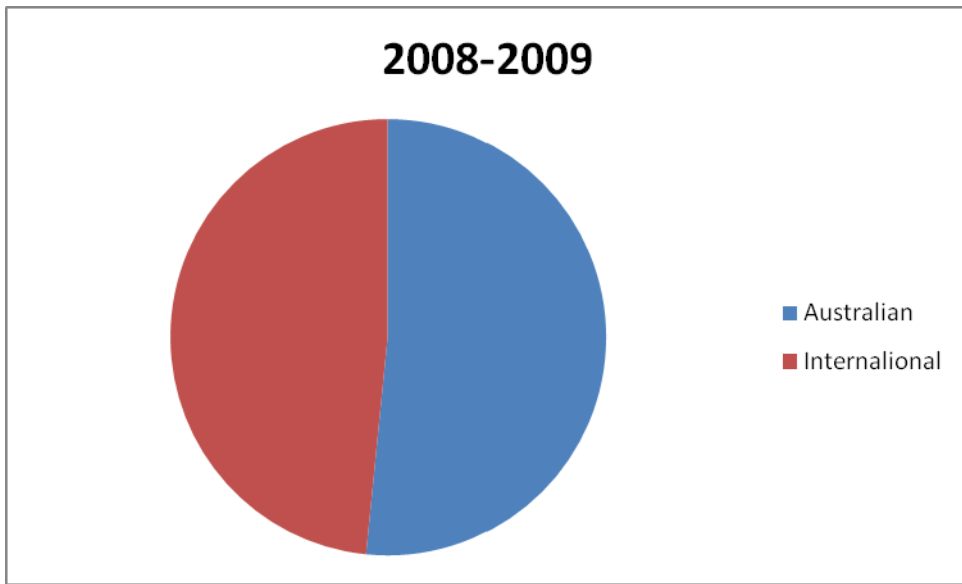


Figure 2b. Proportions of all authors affiliated with Australian or overseas institution in 2008/09

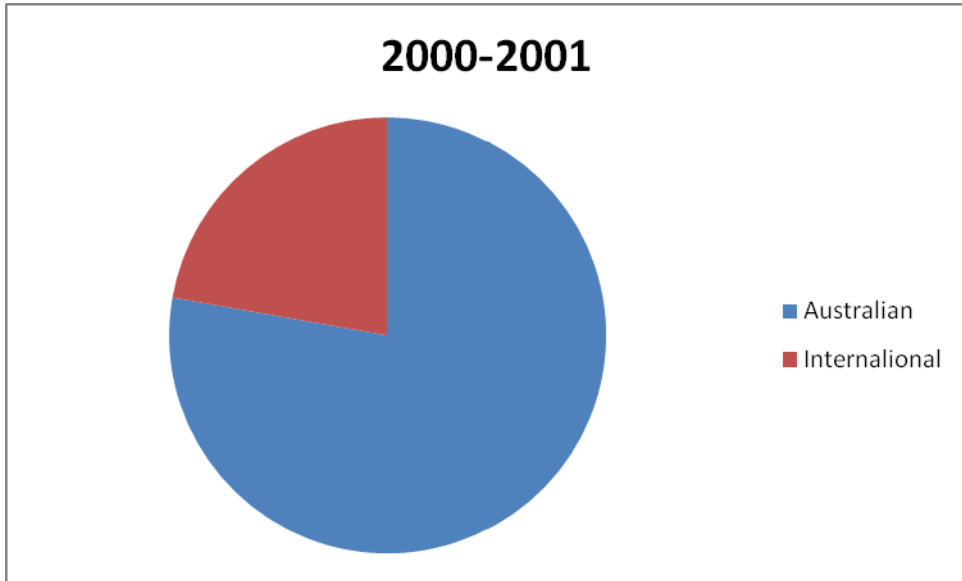


Figure 3a. Proportions of papers where at least one author affiliated with an overseas institution in 2000/01

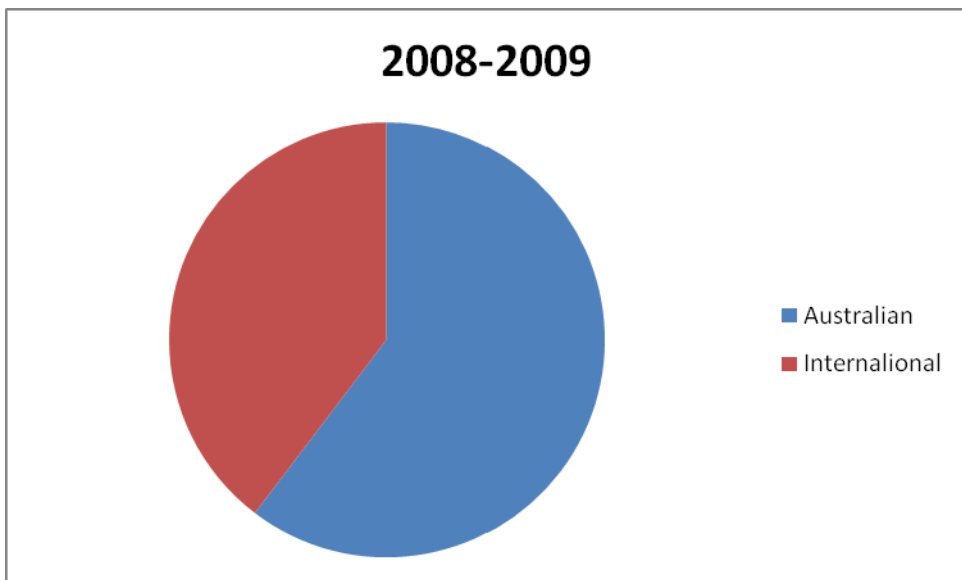


Figure 3b. Proportions of papers where at least one author affiliated with an overseas institution in 2008/09