

To: UNMSOL Journals Committee
From: Maggie Lane, Ashleigh Morris
Editors-in-Chief, Natural Resources Journal
Re: Natural Resources Journal Credit Proposal
Date: January 25, 2011

"I believe the NRJ offers something that law school fails to provide to the larger student body—the NRJ provides students the opportunity to work together to reach the collective goal of publication. The process is not always easy and working together means overcoming individual shortcomings or differences but, in an atmosphere where students are otherwise competing against one another, the students on the NRJ develop relationships that will outlast their formal education." Former NRJ Editor in Chief

I. BACKGROUND: CURRENT WORKLOAD

In order to provide perspective on what NRJ members are currently expected to do, we have provided the estimated completion times for different tasks based on data from our two current issues, 51.1 and 51.2. The NRJ, now almost entirely rid of its backlog, is currently publishing two issues per year: one produced in the fall semester and one produced in the spring semester.

Two issues a year does not necessarily imply less work; it implies more focused work directed towards quality rather than quantity. While four issues a year was unmanageable with the NRJ's relatively small staff, the reduction to two per year will allow the NRJ to raise its rankings by being able to place more focus on content and produce journals in a timely manner (something that is of extreme importance to publishing authors). Two issues a year will also allow the NRJ to finally focus on other pressing issues, such as raising its visibility via its website and maximizing the use of its recently implemented advisory board to plan special issues and broaden the reach of direct submissions.

Of course, before the NRJ even begins the publication process for a given issue, articles must be selected. Currently, the EICs and Managing Editor, with the occasional guidance of the Faculty Editor, organize and read submissions and ultimately select manuscripts for upcoming issues. This year-round task involves reviewing a steady stream of 50-page-plus manuscripts and constant communication with prospective authors, including status updates and information requests.

Articles are submitted to the NRJ (1) directly through our website, (2) through the Berkeley ExpressO service, and (3) through SSRN. This past year, more than 50 articles from around the world were submitted directly to the NRJ,¹ and hundreds more were sent from the other two online submission services. To more effectively distribute this

¹ Direct submissions to the NRJ came from scholars in numerous countries, including England, Canada, South Africa, Australia, Ireland, Zambia, Iran, Nigeria, and India.

workload of reviewing article submissions, the upcoming Board will be expected to actively participate in the abovementioned process likely through a rotating schedule.

Below are the estimated workloads of each NRJ Board and Staff position (Editor in Chief and Managing Editor excluded). These times were calculated according to issue 51.1, which contains five articles (selected in spring of the prior year), with a combined 171 article pages and 898 footnotes.

A. Manuscript Editing²

The five articles in NRJ 51.1 were assigned to five of six manuscript editors (MEs). In addition to time spent giving and receiving comments and feedback from the authors, MEs perform both a substantive and technical edit of each article, and locate and compile authors sources for cite checking. The MEs estimate they spend from 25 to 35 hours/semester or 1.66 to 2.33 hours/week per article on the editing of one article.

B. Citations Editing

The 898 footnotes in issue 51.1 were assigned to three citations editors (CEs). The CEs compile citations for the articles, coordinate the Staff's cite-checking assignments, review the Staff's cite-checking work, and provide a second review of the articles assigned to the other CEs. The first citation review, which includes checking the work of the Staff, takes anywhere from 25 to 50 hours per article (75 to 150 hours/semester or 5 to 10 hours/week). The second cite-check review takes about 10 hours per article (30 hours/semester or 2 hours/week).³

C. Staff Cite Checking

The footnotes in an issue are divided equally among the Staff for cite checking, with each member handling approximately 82 footnotes for issue 51.1. Staff members are required to check both the proposition and formatting of each footnote, and estimate that it takes, on average, 20 minutes to check one citation (1,640 minutes for 82 citations, or 27.33 hours/semester or 1.82 hours/week).

D. Additional Service/Expectations

The above time estimates are only for time spent editing. In addition to this time, Board and Staff members spend a great deal of time in other areas of Journal service.

- The Staff attends a weekly one-hour class.

² These estimated times do not include three separate EIC manuscript edits and one pre-proofs read-through.

³ These estimated times do not include staff training time, i.e. working with the staff on their cite-checking assignments, answering questions, and providing cite checkers with feedback.

- The Staff, in their second semester, begin training for their new Board positions, including working with their mentor on editing assignments in their new positions.
- Board members mentor one staff member throughout the year and are expected to meet with their mentee regularly throughout the semester.
- Board members have additional mentorship and training responsibilities once the incoming Board has been selected and must review a mentee's work throughout an entire phase of editing.
- The Board and Staff are required to attend scheduled meetings⁴ (several a semester).
- The Board and Staff are required to attend intermittent format training classes taught by Lynne (a minimum of one to two a semester).
- Board members are expected to serve on several different committees, e.g., recruitment committees, write-on drafting committees, write-on grading committees, the technology committee (new), and symposium committees.
- The Board and Staff are expected to develop biennial symposiums with the help of the Utton Center, meaning one year's Board/Staff will plan the symposium and call for papers while the next Board/Staff oversees the implementation.
- The Board and Staff will also need to work with Carol Parker to implement the open-access initiative and strengthen our internet presence.
- The Board and Staff will be expected to work with the newly created advisory committee to help raise the Journal's visibility and ranking.

Some of the above mentioned committees are extremely time consuming. For example, the time the Board spends on recruitment alone—much of which takes place during the summer—is huge. Last year, approximately 30 first-year students completed the write-on packet.⁵ Several joint NMLR/NRJ committees worked together to create the packet, which included both a closed legal memorandum and Bluebook citations quiz. Every Journal Citations Editor then scored the quizzes, and every Manuscript editor (and EIC) scored the memos.

II. WHY IS JOURNAL MEMBERSHIP VALUABLE/ATTRACTIVE?

A. Why Serve on the NRJ?

In regard to the committee's request as to why students serve on the NRJ, we thought the best way to provide you with that feedback was through the words of Journal members themselves. As to why students serve on the NRJ, the most-frequent response was to improve writing and editing skills, especially in order to improve chances of employment, as well as to build upon their interest in environmental and natural

⁴ We would like to have weekly meetings actually integrated into class schedules in the future, which would result in an even greater time commitment.

⁵ To address any concern regarding overall student interest in the journals, around 30 students applied and more than 50 students downloaded the application packet.

resources issues (including earning the Natural Resources Certificate). Many students also cited the collegiality as a main reason for Journal service.

Below are some of the responses received:

“I wanted to be on a journal because I enjoy writing, and to be a great writer I must be able to edit other people's writing. I applied because I thought the challenge would be rewarding. And the challenge has certainly been rewarding.”

“The NRJ gave me comprehensive exposure to writing, editing, and legal citation that was not otherwise available as part of my law school experience.”

“I've always been interested in publications and editing, plus I'm an environmentalist. I thought the journal would combine those interests nicely.”

“I wanted to be on NRJ for the Environmental certificate, to hone my writing skills, and to see the process by which legal authors are published.”

“I think a large part of why I wanted to be on a journal was the perceived prestige, and the idea that such service would open up career options. That being said, I wanted to be on the NRJ because I am interested in the issues that are explored in our journal, and in furtherance of my pursuit of the NR certificate. Additionally, I wanted the experience of working on a team that is committed to turn out an excellent product, and gaining editing, citation, etc. skills.”

“Unlike most students at the law school whose first year is the only year where they focus on writing, I was able to develop my legal writing abilities as a staff and board member of the Natural Resources Journal during my entire time I was a student. For my entire second and third year—including the summer in between—I had the opportunity to read, evaluate, and edit scholarly writing in a multitude of fields related to natural resources. While this critical analysis provided me with an opportunity to work with professional authors and develop the substantive and technical aspects of their articles, it also caused me to reflect on and develop my own writing. While I may have wondered whether my own writing was improving at the time I was a member of the NRJ, I can look back now and confidently say that my legal writing was drastically improved because of my tenure with the Natural Resources Journal.”

“I was interested in participating in NRJ because of the opportunities that it would open up in terms of employment after law school. I knew that taking part in a journal would demonstrate to potential future employers that I had excellent writing skills, could pay attention to detail, and could work together with a group of my peers to manage such a large project.”

“I originally wanted to be on the Journal in order to get the Natural Resources Certificate and to help boost my resume. I didn't really have much in the way of

expectations going in, but I certainly hoped to learn more about different aspects of Environmental Law.”

“My desire to serve on the Natural Resources Journal (NRJ) editorial board was tied to my interest in environmental and natural resources law. I chose the University of New Mexico School of Law (UNM), in large part, because of UNM's commitment to the Natural Resources and Environmental Law program, of which I see the NRJ as an integral part.”

“I've always been interested in publications and editing, plus I'm an environmentalist. I thought the journal would combine those interests nicely.”

“I am hoping to understand the process of publication, get to know students who have similar interests in writing and the law and improve my citation and writing skills.”

B. Attitudes Toward Working on Backlog Issues Versus Current Issues

Due to the extraordinary efforts of the current and previous boards, the NRJ has caught up on its backlog of issues. Remarkably, as of this January, the NRJ is on its proper production schedule: All articles for the 51.2 spring issue entered the editing process on time and are expected to be finalized by late spring/early summer.

Regardless, we asked current members how working on the backlog versus a current issue might affect their experience. No consensus exists: Some would prefer to work only on current issues while many others said it would make no difference. Others embraced catching up as an opportunity to finally focus on improving the Journal in other ways, including a shift to quality over quantity and an increase in visibility.

Below are some of the responses regarding this issue:

“I don't think [my interest level in Journal membership] would be much different [without or without a backlog]. I mean, in cleaning up the backlog, we are shaping a better journal for future members. It had to be done sooner or later, right??”

“I took total ownership of the publication process despite the fact that we were trying to catch up on back issues.”

“It really wouldn't matter to me. I try to have a perspective of always moving forward regardless of what was left behind.”

“I am not sure about shaping future journals, except I think that starting with really clear expectations of what will be expected of the staff and their future in the journal is important so people don't jump in without being prepared.”

“Honestly, I would have to answer that working on my own issues wouldn’t have affected my experience. All that I learned and all the relationships I developed were independent of the articles or issues.”

“I certainly agree that producing our own issue would have made the journal more satisfying than playing catch-up. However, this playing catch-up actually mirrors the current state of the New Mexico courts.”

“Obviously, I think that it is easier to feel that one has helped shaped the focus of the journal, the content of the journal, if one is actively engaged in forward-looking tasks, rather than clearing backlog.”

“I think that I would have had a much different experience in that I would have had a lot less technical/formatting experience and would have been able to concentrate more on the actual piece and the editing process itself.”

“Now that the backlog will be cleared, our new board will be able to focus more on quality, efficiency and perhaps expanding the role and presence of the journal in the law school and nationally.”

“Once we get caught up and the experience moves more towards shaping the journal, I would hope to see more symposia and student involvement in tracking down exceptional articles.”

III. CREDIT PROPOSAL

A. Retain Current Credits While Reinstating the Writing Requirement

In looking at the amount of work we expect our Staff and Board to complete, both during the semester as well as over summer and winter breaks, we feel the current credit-allocation scheme (2 credits per semester second year; 3 credits per semester third year) is justified.

However, in response to concerns about the NRJ writing requirement, we have begun discussions on reinstating the requirement for NRJ members to complete student articles. We feel that this is a valuable part of Journal service, and we recognize the importance of encouraging Journal members to push themselves toward the goal of publication. For these reasons, the NRJ is committed to bringing the requirement back, albeit with more support and some logistical changes.

One issue discussed during the last Journals Committee meeting was how to ensure that Journal Staff members receive more support before taking on the endeavor of writing a full-length article on a topic that, although students are interested in, they likely have limited legal exposure to. These discussions have led to the EICs and Professor Benson, in conjunction with the faculty’s Environment and Natural Resources Committee (on which an EIC of the NRJ also serves) working on a first-year/second-semester

introductory natural/environmental resources course that, although likely not a formal prerequisite for Journal service, would allow those students interested in the Journal to gain earlier exposure to natural and environmental resources law, as well as facilitate earlier conversations and more pragmatic preparation for the drafting of the article.

We would propose that the Journal member choose a member of the faculty as their advisor, rather than have the NRJ Faculty Advisor be the sole advisor on every student article. The article, completed by a Journal student and signed off on by a qualified faculty member, would meet the school's standard for the advanced writing requirement as a written product that "build[s] on comprehensive legal research" and is "a substantive and substantial analytical experience, culminating in a significant paper that has undergone a series of systematic, thorough, and scheduled revisions." Because the Journal Staff is already required to attend a weekly class which specifically focuses on the editing and writing skills needed to both edit professional articles and draft student articles, the advanced writing seminar is an unnecessary component to the NRJ student article. We are also discussing how the student Board members could serve as reviewing editors for a Staff member's student article, in conjunction with the faculty advisor, similar to the model used by the New Mexico Law Review.

An alternative method for reinstating the NRJ student article would be to require students to complete their article/advanced writing requirement through a separate environment- and natural-resources-related seminar. The student would still draft the writing requirement as a student article, with the possibility of publication through the NRJ. Depending on whether or not it would be too difficult for students to arrange for independent faculty advisors, as described in the above, the Journal may need to entertain this second option more seriously.

In summary, we would propose to retain the current credit allocation, with the understanding that beginning with next year's staff, the NRJ will once again require its members to complete a full-length student article using one of the aforementioned plans.

B. Lowering Credits

If the faculty feels the credits must be lowered in light of the NRJ's commitment to reinstate the student article, we would propose to reduce the second-year credits to 1 per semester, and keep the third-year credits at three per semester.

A reduction in credit, with reinstatement of the student article, will result in a severe under-valuing of the time and effort expected for the Journal. Because this option fails to adequately award credit for the amount of work done, we fear the interest in serving on a Journal would greatly diminish. Additionally, lowering the total credit hours earned for NRJ service would impact the Natural Resources Certificate. Currently, ten hours of Journal service go toward the certificate. Reducing that amount to eight credit hours provides little to no incentive to serve on the Journal as a way to earn this certificate, as more outside hours would be needed to fulfill the 21 credit-mandate. Again, this would dissuade students serving on the NRJ.

For a number of reasons, if the credits must be lowered we have suggested that the credit reduction occur in the second, rather than the third year. We do not wish to lower the credit for Board members, nor do we wish to re-allocate credits amongst the different Board positions. There are many positions within the Board that warrant far more than three credits, but because every Board position is equally important to the successful production of the Journal, we do not wish to in any way facilitate a belief that a lesser amount of credits means a lesser amount of expected effort. Furthermore, we would like to encourage the NRJ Staff, rather than the Board, to compensate for the loss of credits by taking the additional one to two courses sooner rather than later, as students have a sufficient number of other obligations and deadlines to juggle in their final year.

IV. CONCLUSION

The NRJ recommends awarding a 2/2/3/3 credit system with the reinstatement of the student article. However, more discussion is needed, both among the faculty and the incoming NRJ Board, to determine the best way to facilitate its reintegration.