

Special Session 2: Publishing, Research Communication, and Engagement | Text Transcript | CIRCLE Graduate South Asia Conference

This is a text transcript for recorded special session “Publishing, Research Communication, and Engagement.” The special session was part of CIRCLE’s Graduate South Asia Conference, held from September 29 to October 1, 2022.

Transcript:

Dilshan Fernando:

This is actually the last session of our conference. It's a special session on “Publishing, Research, Communication, and Engagement,” like Charles mentioned. We have more weeks until our videos will be online if that's all right. So, okay, let me introduce our panelists, and then I'll briefly state the order of speeches.

So, we've got Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi, Professor of Economics and International Development studies at Trent University, and he is former Editor-in-Chief of *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*. His research focuses on agrarian political economy, feminist development economics, peasant economics, political ecology and sustainable rural livelihoods, and food systems analysis. Thank you for being here, Dr. Lodhi.

Dilshan Fernando:

And we have Dr. Owen Roberts with us. He's an instructor and faculty member in Communications at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign – did I pronounce it correctly?

Owen Roberts:

Yes, that's right.

Dilshan Fernando:

He's a former director of Research Communications at the University of Guelph. He's a journalist and a columnist with daily, weekly and monthly print and online media, that includes realagriculture.com, *Guelph Today*, as well as his blog *Urban Cowboy*. I think the Twitter handle is also *Urban Cowboy*. Thank you for being here, Owen, really. So, if that's okay, I'll turn it over to Dr Akram-Lodhi first, to speak about publishing, and then we'll go to Owen if that's okay.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

Okay, well thanks very much Dilshan. What I'm going to do in the time that I've got to talk to all of you today is talk about the process of journal publication, from the submission of a scholarly paper to its acceptance. Because - of course, that is for those of you doing graduate work - that is sort of the metric by which your future career prospects will very strongly be evaluated.

Now I come from the perspective of someone who still publishes in scholarly journals and does this every year, but I also, as Dilshan has indicated, was the former editor of the Canadian Journal of Development Studies. And so, I also come at this from the perspective of being a former editor of a journal. Before going into the process itself, I do think it's worthwhile to make three remarks about manuscripts that you're thinking of submitting for publication to a scholarly journal.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

The first thing I'd point out is it's really quite important to know the journal. And what I mean by this, is I don't just mean understand and comply with the submission guidelines - but I should emphasize, always comply with the submission guidelines, because editors hate it when submissions do not. Now what I mean is that most journals have their own "house style."

It's a tone or a way in which arguments are presented, a structure which is very often quite uniform across articles. And so, it's important that you craft your article with an understanding of the journal to which you are submitting it. You just don't want to write something and submit it on spec. You want to make sure that it's fairly consistent with the style of the journal, and that's quite important.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

The second thing that I think is really important is a piece of advice that a friend of mine gave me when he was on my doctoral committee, back in the 20th century [Laughs]. And that advice has been really invaluable. And his advice was don't make your paper good, make your paper good enough. Now what he meant by this was that many young scholars agonize about producing the "perfect paper." The paper that will leave a mark. As a result of this, they spend months and months perfecting the paper.

Then, along comes peer review, and if your paper is not rejected, chances are you're going to have to make very significant changes to your "perfect paper." Some of which you may not like. So, your "perfect paper" will not be so perfect anymore, in your own eyes. So, when submitting a paper, the issue is not to craft a "perfect paper" that will get published, it seems to me. The issue is to produce a paper that is good enough to get into peer review. And what this means is don't worry about crossing all the T's and dotting all the I's.

Make it good enough so that it is not rejected. Because if a journal does not reject your paper outright, and asks for revisions, there is probably an 80 percent or better chance that with patience, the paper will be published. So, I think not going for the perfect paper and submitting that I think is really important. And a lot of young scholars have a really hard time dealing with revision demands, when they have what they think is a really solid paper, because they think they're undoing the work they're doing.

The third comment, I've just added literally five minutes before we came on, because it really struck me that I should say something. And that is beware of predatory journals. These are journals in which you pay an "author processing fee" or APC to get published. Some of these

journals look very, very respectable. Some of them have a very significant impact factor. There's one published by MDPI [Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute] which is one of the largest troves of predatory journals.

They produce a journal called *Sustainability* - great title - and it has a very significant impact factor of over five. But the thing is, *Sustainability* publishes more than 80 000 articles a year, and that's the reason they've got this large impact factor, they just produce so much. And most academics in your field know that when you publish and pay to publish papers, you are not subjected to rigorous peer review, and that's what these predatory journals do.

You will submit an article, they may come back with a referee report in a few weeks - and it's always a short period of time - and you may make the changes, and chances are, the original paper will end up getting published as soon as you pay on the dotted line.

So, if you look at the length of time from first submission to publication on these predatory journals, it very often is like a month. It's very, very short because they want your money, and the amount of money is quite significant. And you don't want to put an article in a predatory journal on your CV, because someone on that tenure committee will know it's a pay-to-publish journal, even if it's got the impact factor.

So, you've really got to train yourself to be aware of these predatory journals, because they are really everywhere. And there are a few stables of them that look really good, and look very professional, and there's actually quite a few which look terrible, so be careful of that. So, into the meat of what I want to say, but I won't speak for too long. So, when you submit a paper to a good journal, it usually will receive an initial evaluation first, because very few journals these days will put all submissions out to peer review.

That used to be the case back as late as the 90s and the early 2000s, but it's not the case anymore. The volume of submissions is simply too high and getting peer reviewers is too difficult. So, the initial evaluation, it may be done by an editor, it may be done by an associate editor, it may be done by the journal's editorial office, or it may be a combination.

The purpose of that evaluation, that initial evaluation, is to decide whether the paper goes into peer review. The response you get from an initial evaluation - you may not get a response. You won't know this has even taken place. If you get a reject, the initial evaluation may be quite curt in what it says, not really telling you anything. Sometimes, it's what I try to do, it could be quite thorough. Initial evaluations can be quite dismissive, but they can also at times be quite supportive. The initial evaluation can come very quickly, sometimes the initial evaluation can take three months or more.

The key that point that I'd like you to take away is that if the paper does not survive an initial evaluation, do not give up on it. Even if you do not get significant comments as a result of that initial evaluation, do not give up on it. There are ways of which you can think about creatively taking a paper which has been initially rejected, and rethinking it, reusing it, and submitting it elsewhere. So, you should never give up on anything that you write.

Now, if the initial evaluation is positive, then your paper will go into peer review. And you should know, of course I hope you'd know, that peer review is our quality assurance process. It emerges out of science, but it's of course extremely important in social science and humanity scholarly research. And it's a process which allows you to produce a better piece of work. It should not be seen as a process by which people simply want to criticize you. Although, it can be very emotionally hard to take the criticisms that you may get in in peer review, because some of them can be very stinging. I know, because I've received these.

What a peer review should do - and so peer reviews can be supportive, or they can be harsh. A lot of them remain very harsh, especially in certain disciplines, they can be very harsh. In my discipline of economics, peer review is just a minefield of bad behavior on the part of reviewers who use their anonymity to be far too brutal, and not being supportive of young scholars. But a good peer review should evaluate your paper for both its strengths and its weaknesses, and then focusing upon the weaknesses, make a judgment as to whether the paper should be again, rejected or whether it should be revised.

For most scholarly journals, peer review is double-blind. So the peer reviewer does not know who the author is, and the author does not know who the peer reviewer is. But some journals do review blind, in which the peer reviewer knows who the author is, but the author does not know who the peer reviewer is. And there are some, and it's increasingly becoming the case now, where peer review is not blind. In which both the author and the reviewer know the identity of the other. Because there is research to indicate that identity can affect the process of review.

Most journals use two peer reviewers, some journals use three, there are some small journals with smaller impact factors, which only use one. The peer review process ideally takes about a month, but it's really important to understand that it can take significantly longer, and it's important as someone submitting an article to be patient.

It can take a long time to find suitable peer reviewers. But peer reviewers are doing the review as a service to the field, providing their time for nothing. And for journal editors, finding reviewers is without doubt the longest step in the process of review. It can take four months to find a peer reviewer. And we have had situations at the Canadian Journal of Development Studies where we were not able to find reviewers, so it can be lengthy.

Once it's complete, three months down the line, six months down the line, nine months down the line, you will get an email as a letter. And that email will usually be one of the following categories: rejection, revise and resubmit as a new submission, major revision, or minor revision. Acceptance without revision is exceedingly rare, and don't expect it. Rejection is the norm.

For the Canadian Journal of Development Studies, about 17% of all submissions made it through peer review to publication, and many good journals have a far lower acceptance rate. For the Journal of Development Studies, it's about 10% make it through; for World Development it's about 4% make it through. So, rejection rates are very high. But even a reject

can be useful. Because once the paper has gone through peer review, the letter will contain a summary of the key points raised in the evaluation by the peer reviewers.

And even if it's a reject, these can consist of a paragraph, or several paragraphs, or multiple pages, and these comments can help you revise your paper to make it more publishable. If the paper is deemed to be a major or a minor revision, the task of the editor is to summarize the key points made in the evaluation, to summarize what to take away from the detailed comments of the peer reviewers, and to indicate to the author what are the essential points from the peer reviews that the author must consider.

And this is because the peer reviewers may not agree. You can get a peer reviewer who says, "This paper is wonderful," and get another peer reviewer in which the peer reviewer says, "Reject." And if this – yeah.

Dilshan Fernando:

One minute.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

Yeah, I've got three slides left. Sorry, what was I saying?

Dilshan Fernando:

Peer reviews?

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

You were saying that even if it is a reject, there is feedback at the end of the letter.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

That's right. Now the point is that peer reviewers - if it's a major revision, you can get people who completely disagree - reject with an accept. When this happens, very often it will be considered a major revision. The letter from the editor is then very important, because this contains the revisions that you must attend to. And this is important - many journals treat the decision letter from the editor as an implicit contract.

"If you do this, we will seriously consider your paper better." So, what it means, is you must address the comments in the letter, and you must address the peer reviewers comments summarized by the editor, as comprehensively as possible. And if you choose not to accept a comment, you must go into detail and explain why. Because if you don't do that, that will be a basis for rejection. That's me.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Thank you, Haroon. Over to you, Owen. So do you want to turn on your microphone?

Owen Roberts:

Yes, I have it on now.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Okay thank you.

Owen Roberts:

Can you hear me okay?

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Yeah, loud and clear, thank you.

Owen Roberts:

Okay. Hi everyone, and hello, my colleague Dr Haroon. It was great to hear your perspective. It was very clear, and publishing is so important. Publishing is important, academic publishing, as Dr Haroon said, in scholarly publishing. The thing that I encourage everyone is to get published - my suggestion is to also try to get published in a non-academic way, as in the popular press or on a website, or on a blog, or whatever the case may be.

Because A) It's good practice to be able to explain what your discipline is and what your interests might be. And you know, there's that classic saying - and it's been attributed to several people, but it's Mark Twain who has, I think, received the most credibility for having said it, although people say Churchill said it as well. Is that "I didn't have time to write you a short letter, so I wrote you a long one instead."

And what they're trying to get across here is that there's a skill, and an art, and a reason for writing short and concise. And with that in mind, I try to encourage people to think and write for the media like a journalist. Because if we're trying to get to people who need to understand what we're trying to say, and what our interests are, then we need to adopt some journalistic techniques.

A lot of those people who are making decisions about your future, granting council committees, and more so though, government organizations who would not have the same depth of understanding as a review committee would - they'll have a peripheral understanding of what your interests are, and your discipline - but not a deep one. And hopefully they too are going to their own advisory committees, or their own granting committees, if you're submitting a research proposal.

But, with research interests becoming so refined and so narrow, it's really important to be able to be very clear with your "so what?" and "who cares?". And that's what a journalist is always looking for in a story, is "so what" and "who cares." And that's what a granting council will be looking at, and that's what a government will be looking at, so this is really my message: is to try to think like your audience, and really understand who your audience is.

It'll vary, but the more people who understand what it is you're doing, the better it is for you as a researcher; for your discipline, and for your chances to succeed. And maybe not even outside of academia. Of course, academia is not looking for a 250-to-500-word synopsis of what your interests might be, but the people who are, you know, the spouses or the offspring of those who are making decisions about whether or not you're going to get money - they might go home at night and talk to the people who are making those decisions, saying "Yeah, you know I heard something interesting today," or, "I read something interesting today, saw something interesting today about such and such."

And they can't do that unless you're out there making a statement publicly, and as I said it might just be on your own blog, and that's fine, that's out there, and because it's worldwide, everybody can read it. So that's really my message, is to pursue academic and scholarly publishing when it's the right thing to do. And of course, it always is as an academic, as a researcher. But also, don't forget about the importance of publishing in the popular press as well, or publishing widely in a non-academic way, to help people understand what it is you do.

A great way to approach this is with an elevator speech. An elevator speech is that 30-second speech where you step on an elevator with somebody on the eighth floor of a building, and by the time it gets down to the ground floor, you've had an opportunity to say "Hi, I'm so-and-so, and here's my research interest." Usually after they ask you what it is, rather than just blurting it out [laughs] but the idea is making it very concise and very short.

So, thanks for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you. I'm sorry I can't have my camera on to see you, I continue to work as a as a journalist as well, and I'm today kind of in the middle of a cornfield in Illinois. So, thanks to the miracle of communications, I'm able to be with you. And I'm grateful that I could do that. And thanks for the invitation, Dilshan and Sharada.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thanks so much, Dr. Roberts.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Dilshan, since Owen will leave shortly, maybe you could do a round of questions quickly, and then have our last speaker, Professor Rengaswamy.

Dilshan Fernando:

Owen, can you hang in for a couple minutes?

Owen Roberts:

Yes, I can. The people I'm coming out to see, they said they were just tagging a calf, so I have about five more minutes. This is the reality of a journalist.

Dilshan Fernando:

Okay, short and sweet question. I know we've spoken about social media a lot. How important is Tweeting and putting things on Instagram and on the internet for a researcher and an academic?

Owen Roberts:

Well, I think it's very important. And I'm not saying it takes the place of academic publishing whatsoever, but it can help drive your audience towards your academic piece. There are other ways to do it, but you know, the modern way, the way that is becoming more and more accepted, is by using social media. And it also helps you refine your story. You know, social media just doesn't have that much room, or that much space.

If you're fashioning, tailoring your message, your academic, your research message; this is a great place to give it a try. And decision makers are also on social media, and they're watching to see what you have to say and how you're saying it, and can their support of you - is it being amplified? I mean, if you receive a grant and you are on social media talking about your achievements as a result of that grant, or your hopes and aspirations as a result of that grant, you may be followed in a positive way by granting councils or by whoever gave you the research grant.

And I don't really know how much influence there is over a granting council, but if two researchers are exactly nose-to-nose at the finish line when a grant application comes up - if there's one that is better known and if media had something to do with it, I would think people like doing business with those they know. People like working with those they know. If a decision maker thinks they know you as a result of having some type of a social media presence, I think you might be in better shape.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thanks Owen. Sharada?

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Thanks Dilshan, thanks Owen. We will have questions for Haroon and the last speaker, because Owen you have to leave early so we are doing these questions with you. Most academics suck at the kind of stuff that you are asking us to do Owen. So I get it, you know I've benefited a lot from you know your article on how to write the blog - the what, so what and the now what - you know. I've really benefited. But how do you institutionalize something like this? Because you know PhD students, faculty are not trained in communicating with non-academic audiences. So what sort of things should we be asking the University or the institutions that we are a part of, to up that skill?

Owen Roberts:

Yeah. Well, thanks for that question, and I'm always glad to work with you as well Sharada in your classes, this is how we got to meet so many great students. Universities, typically, a good

university, a good research university, will have a good research communications department, or a good public affairs department.

Something related to communications. Now, those folks are there to serve you. Asking them to perhaps put on a workshop for you, or if they're already putting on workshops about social media and about communication, and they may very well be doing that. Because they're getting good, many of them have been very good for a long time.

A nice thing about university - close to young people all the time - very aware of trends, very aware of the importance of social media as far as recruitment goes. So, they have experts who can help you and can help graduate students, anybody, faculty members, be better communicators.

So, I'd really encourage anyone who is listening to look into that at their own university. Ask if you can either get some assistance individually, or if there's a workshop being put on in the near future about better communications. And if there isn't, you can ask or you can say, "Well, you know that would be a good idea if you put one on."

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Thanks, Owen.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you so much, Owen, for those insights. Let me now turn the floor over to Dr Raghunathan Rengaswamy. Thanks for being here, Dr Rengaswamy. He's a Dean of Global Engagement and Professor of Chemical Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. His research focuses on fault detection diagnosis, the development of sensor placement algorithms for FDD and full cells. Again, we're very fortunate to have you sir. The floor is yours.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Thank you for inviting me, and I'm sorry I had some time zone confusion, so I thought it was half an hour of the side anyway. Thanks for inviting me, I'm happy to be here. I see from the panel I was going to talk about what global engagement means, why global engagement, and how graduate students can benefit from such activities.

So, let me quickly start by talking about what we think of global engagement at IIR Madras does. Essentially, I think it is time now. We've heard this term before, the world is flat and so on, which is really true now. You know, the pandemic changed some of this, but pandemic has also reshaped some of this. So, taking the pandemic outside of the discussion, I think we all feel that the world is really flat - and what do we mean by flat in the sense of academic collaborations and global engagement is something that I'll talk about.

At IIT Madras, for us, what global engagement means is bringing academic collaborations, bringing the best programs to students all over the world. Having our students go and then

experience research cultures at different universities and language, enrich them, and have students from different countries come into our campus at higher demographics.

So, we are looking at mobility, and considerable mobility both inwards and outwards at this time. And of course, also talk about how you can leverage these experiences towards improving your academics. So, broadly, if you look at India and countries here, it's not been - I would say a level playing field for many years, until recently, in terms of the universities and the kind of universities that we have in India and abroad and pay structures and things like that.

So, what I mean by this is most of the time we've had mobility from countries like India towards Western universities, in terms of graduate student population and faculty and so on. This is simply because the research infrastructure was better outside countries such as ours, and as a result, most students would like - from a graduate student perspective - would like to go abroad and then learn from universities abroad.

This is not only restricted to graduate students of course, I myself as a graduate student went to the US, did a PhD, and then spent multiple years teaching in the U.S before coming back to India to teach. So, in terms of faculty, most of the time the mobility was in this direction. Now, I think things are changing considerably. And I want to address this particularly because I think when you look at some of the top universities in India now, the kind of research infrastructure has increased tremendously. The quality of work that is being done has also tremendously increased, and because of that, we see a lot of interest from universities from all over the world in wanting to collaborate with India.

So, what this is going to impact, as far as graduate students are concerned, is that there is going to be this opportunity to be able to partake in this change. And then you know, look at universities all over the world to go and spend time and learn from and so on. In particular, when we think of global engagement and countries in India and others in South Asia and so on, there are peculiar problems which essentially lead to opportunities.

Just take for example, you know, problems related to pollution and so on, or problems related to energy usage and all that. These are all problems that are really severe, and most of the impacts actually you see in countries like India. So, if you were actually doing research on some of these areas and you wanted to get the best data out of this, I think India is a place, right?

So, in terms of opportunities, in terms of research opportunities themselves, you know countries like India have a lot to offer. So, what we see now is because there is this potential to do fantastic research, and potential to get, for example in some areas the most relevant data, there is a lot of interest in working with Indian universities and so on. And, of course the economies are improving, so that basically means that places like India have become attractive even for people to come in and start working.

So, in that sense the competition is going to only increase for graduate students all over the world in terms of mobility. So, there is both this opportunity in terms of being able to travel anywhere in the world to collaborate and work together. At the same time, there is also this

kind of notion that if you are an institution anywhere in the world, you can source the best resources and people from anywhere in the world.

So, in that sense it's not local anymore. It is a lot more global in terms of both opportunities and challenges. This is what we see. I think it is important that graduate students understand this and then kind of look at whatever they do in a much more global perspective, in terms of looking at how they can enhance their work through these collaborations, and also look at what's going to happen in the future. Where is going to be the best research that is going to be done, where are going to be the best opportunities? And not look at my local community, local region and say this is where my opportunities are going to be, or this is where the competition is going to come from.

So, it is a lot more global, and I think it is important for graduate students to understand this. And I think as we go forward, with all kinds of technology now right, for example hybrid education and distance education, I believe it would have taken another decade really to be where we are if there was not COVID, right. We would still be scorning and looking down on online programs and so on. And now with COVID, online hybrid programs becoming the norm, you essentially can learn from anywhere in the world.

So, there is also going to be lot more joint academic programs where you can learn hybrid more and so on. Again, this is both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity is you know, you could stay anywhere in the world and learn from the best in a hybrid mode. That is the opportunity for everyone. The challenges, supposing you're saying, "How do I source students?", you've got to compete with every university in the world, right? Because every university can put their programs online now. I see this more and more happening in terms of every university starting a digital wing, and then where you could start doing your Masters completely online and things like that.

So, when this happened - then again, the challenge is how do you manage this kind of competition? So, from my viewpoint, I think this "world becoming flat" and this mobility is going to have a transformational effect in terms of how academics is conducted everywhere in the world.

Research is going to be a lot more collaborated with multiple universities from different countries coming together. Education is going to be a lot more collaborative. Education is going to be democratized a lot more if it's not been done already. The best quality courses and so on are not going to be preserved for the top institutions, students in the top institutions, because these are going to be democratized, which is a good thing.

So, these are trends I think graduate students, as they as they do their graduate work, have to think about and be cognizant of. And this is the most important message that I would like to deliver here. So, think about - when there is research, think about the whole world. Think about where the best work is being done. With mobility being there, look at how you can leverage the best out there and in terms of learning again.

You know, one can start learning from anywhere in the world. And finally, in terms of thinking about your career, it might just happen that the best jobs could be anywhere in the world, and again with the economies. You know, countries like India, the economy is growing and some kind of parity coming, in even in this faculty positions, salaries and so on, it might be just that the best jobs are not right where they are.

So, these are things to keep in mind as we have this globalization that occurs. And this is what we are saying, just to give you an idea. We have about 300 MOU's, different universities in the world, which would have been unthinkable, you know 20-25 years back. We have about 20 giant doctoral programs at several universities in the world, through which our students are pursuing PhDs. And multiple universities we are looking at, multiple joint degree programs, all of this tells me that both education from the viewpoint of actual coursework and research is going to be a lot more international, a lot more global, a lot more connected.

And that is going to really have a transformative effect in terms of what opportunities exist for graduate students and what challenges graduate students need to face. So, I would stop here and then I can take questions on any of this.

Dilshan Fernando:

Sure, thank you so much for that intervention, Dr. Rengaswamy. We will have about 15 minutes for questions. You can either type in your question in the chat, or you can face your hand on Zoom, I hope you know how to do that. I have several questions for both the panelists. Let's start - there's a question here for Dr. Akram-Lodhi, and the question is, "how can grad students publish open access, which involves a hefty fee? Is it important for graduate students to publish open access?"

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

I think that's a very good question. Open access is important because obviously the first thing is, that it communicates your research to a much broader audience, because your audience is not limited to those that have particular journals in their libraries. And many, many universities have very extensive library collections, but even my own university in my field of study has limits, and there are some major journals which we simply do not get. So, open access gets around that in particular. So, publishing open access is always a good thing to try and pursue.

Now, it is true that open access publication involves a hefty fee. But I do think the first thing that's important, to go back to my initial comments, is to distinguish open access in reputable journals versus open access in predatory journals. In the predatory journals, the costs of open access are usually not necessarily clear up front.

And then you get involved in the process, and then you realize you've got to pay a significant amount of money to get out; and because you've invested time in doing so, you try and figure out how to do it for the reputable journals. If you want to publish open access, on the main page, they will all say, "How to publish Open Access in this journal," and they will tell you how much it will cost.

And the normal charges for an open access journal, for an open access publication, in social science in an international publisher, such as Routledge, is about 3,000 US Dollars. So, how do you get around that? Well, it's increasingly the case that doctoral funding in many countries actually includes an element of money that can go towards open access publishing.

And that's because, in many countries, open access publishing is part and parcel of how the funders of graduate education want to see their investments realized, through Open Access. So, for people who are studying in developed country settings, very often your scholarships, your research support will involve money for open access.

Secondly, better universities will have funds set aside for open access charges. For graduate students if you apply for them; and so that's very important to be aware, that there are monies to support research publication - and that it's important to check out to see whether or not you can access those monies.

Now having said all of that, I do think it's important to make the core point that publishing in high quality journals closed is more important than publishing period open access. Getting in a highly ranked journal is very important for visibility, it's very important for your CV in terms of job applications.

And it is also the case that getting into a highly ranked journal will give you a lot of looks, a lot of downloads, simply because of the journal that you're publishing in. Because what you want to demonstrate when you've only got a few publications is reader engagement with your publication, and that comes from numbers of downloads, that comes from numbers of citations, and things of that sort.

Open access articles get more downloads, but they do not necessarily get more citations. So, one has to pay very careful attention to those sorts of metrics. But open access is the future. The only fundamental issue is we don't really know what the open access model in 15 years is going to look like. Right now, it's a minefield - it's a minefield.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you. There's another question for Dr. Rengaswamy. The question is, "How do we initiate collaboration? What is the first step?" And can I also add a bit to it - how do we initiate collaboration between South Asian countries, rather than Western South Asia? Those are the questions.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Yeah. I think most of the universities, at least I can talk about IITs in India, have really well-established global engagement offices. Each of the universities might call it slightly differently, at IIT Madras we call it the Office of Global Engagement. I know, for example, IIT Bombay has an International Relations Office.

And, you know, universities in the West have had an international office for years now, right? But universities in India, it's a very peculiar situation, a question of supply and demand, and we

had a lot more demand than we could supply. Particularly if you take IITs for example. So, we really didn't focus on internationalization, maybe until about 15 years back.

But right now, the mood in India has internationalization, let me tell you that. So, for example, at IIT Madras we have a very vibrant Office for Global Engagement; and so, you just simply write saying, you know, "We are interested in collaborations, what are the possibilities?" Someone will get back and then start a conversation.

And then it starts with an initial Zoom meeting between interested parties, and depending on what the interest is, things get escalated to different groups, and this is how we do most of our interactions. Sometimes we also do outreach ourselves, but most of the IITs and IIT Madras in particular, have a very vibrant Global Engagement Office; where I think if there is a contact that is made, we can start the dialogue.

That's as simple as that. And depending on the interest, it could be just a memorandum of understanding, to say, "Hey, we decide to work together." Start with a few faculty exchanges, start some research, and then build to - you know, if it makes sense to - joint programs, mobility agreements, and so on. So that's the first part of the question.

So, the other question about South Asia, that you asked Dilshan. It's interesting. I can give you IIT Madras perspective. From an IIT Madras perspective, we believe global engagement means really global engagement. It's just not engagement with universities in the West. And so, for example, I personally myself travelled to Sri Lanka many times, I travelled to Nepal. And in fact, we have a joined Master's program on Energy Systems with Kathmandu University at Nepal, and we are looking at how to do such programs with universities in Sri Lanka, and so on.

So, we have very actively reached out to - we have gone to Bangladesh, and we are going to go to many universities in Africa. This is simply because I think there are regions which need some of these programs, and we believe some of these can be delivered from institutions like IIT. So, we have done the outreach ourselves.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you. Sharada, I think you have a question to ask.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Yes. Thank you Dr. Rengaswamy for joining this session. I come from Chennai, so I have a very, very soft spot for IIT Madras. You know, a few years ago just before the pandemic, I had accompanied the Dean of my college to a couple of universities in India. Now, a lot of what you were talking about, you know in terms of the demand and supply for collaboration and for doing these exchanges; I'm not sure how easy it is in the social sciences and humanities.

So, almost all the universities that we visited in India, you know they were talking about how while their students are able to go abroad, whether it's to the UK or to North America; they have a hard time attracting students from these countries in social sciences and humanities to be part of their universities. Because a lot of these are exchange programs, right?

So, they will say one university, one student, and matching one student. So, some adjustments have been made. For example, in one of the programs which the university mentioned where they said the MOU was adjusted to say the Indian university could send three students, matched by one student from their university.

So, from one to one, they moved to three to one. And still, they are not able to attract students. I mean, I can see with the sciences the mobility is a lot easier than social sciences. But, sitting where you are, as the Dean of Global Engagement, how do you or what are the sort of challenges you see in fostering this kind of academic mobility in the social sciences and humanities? And I know IIT Madras has a fantastic humanities and social sciences department. Thank you.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Thank you for the question. I'll answer this question in general, and then come back to humanities as a specific case. So, it's interesting that you know, we look at both the inbound and outbound students. And ideally if you ask me, as a Dean at IIT Madras, I would actually like to see parity. I would like to see as many students going abroad as there are students coming into India and at IIT Madras.

But as you rightly pointed out, the current situation is a lot more students go out of India to universities and very few actually come back, come into our programs. And there are multiple reasons for it. Number one, I think for the longest time we have not really sold how good the academic programs are, and how much you can learn by coming to a place which is very different from you know the setup that you have.

So, for example, for a student in Canada to do an exchange in the U.S, while it's great and academically great; but culturally I would think the experiences are not as rich, I would say, as going to India and being thrown into this midst of chaos and part chaos-part organization and so on. The kind of things that you learn from this experience is tremendous.

And there's just so much to learn, that I believe the Indian universities, because of various reasons, that take a panel in itself - we have not really promoted ourselves as a destination where you come not just to see, but you just come in for the overall experience which is both academic and cultural. And that would be such an enriching experience for students.

I think we need to do a better job of selling this. And this disparity is slowly changing, and I see a lot more students. For example, this year we have 50 Master's students from the South Asian region and African countries who are doing a master's program at IIT Madras. We have about 60 exchange students from all over U.S and Europe and so on. So, that that is changing.

The reasons, as I mentioned, are people don't know. People have all these notions about what will happen if you go to one of these countries, and again there is also this exchange which we need to really think about. The kind of stipends we give for students when they are India, when you convert it into dollars and so on, it's not a big number. And that is going to change in the next decade, but that's the reason.

In terms of humanities, per se, I think again part of this is being able to sell the university. And I really think, in fact particularly in humanities, I would actually feel the opportunities for studies, pilot studies, and understanding complex social-cultural questions are a lot more important, and a lot more richer, and a lot more exciting in India. So, I would really think that that we should encourage lot more inward mobility into social sciences.

And that essentially boils down to making the correct relationships and having articulate faculty going around and saying, "Hey, these are the opportunities that exist, how do we collaborate?" and so on. At IIT Madras, for example, we have a group of faculty who work in memory studies; and the number of events that they have conducted, and the kind of positive values and the number of people who come into this group. It tells me that there's just a lot of appetite, but you need people who are motivated, who are articulate, who are doing very exciting stuff to bring people.

Dilshan Fernando:

Okay. I see that we are on time if there are no other questions, are there any more questions?

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

It's a comment in the chat, I don't know if it's just a comment.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

[Reading text in chat] At what stage should a PhD student start thinking of engagement? It is a question it looks like, Dilshan. So, the answer is very straightforward: the sooner the better.

But it also depends on the program that you are in. If it's a graduate program, and if someone is interested in international experience, then it usually makes sense to finish all the requirements for your graduate, you know comprehensive and whatever proposal procedure is there in the university. Finish that and think about global engagement.

If you are an undergraduate student, I think third year, fourth year where you could have a semester abroad would be a very apt time to think about how to engage yourself, with you know a season abroad.

Dilshan Fernando:

Okay. There's another question, "How are instructors coping with hybrid delivery?"

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

It depends on the instructor, I think to a large extent [Laughs]. But I think hybrid delivery has become the norm. Yeah, it is - you know you can't say, "I can't cope with hybrid delivery" anymore. And I think younger folks, younger faculty are of course a lot more nimble with technology.

I think they do a great job of this hybrid delivery. But this has become the norm, at least definitely a IIT Madras, all of us have to really think about hybrid. When, during COVID time,

two full semesters we had every course which was online; and once things opened up, now the campus is completely open, students come in.

But still, we have to do many of these courses hybrid for various reasons. And many other programs that I talked about, in terms of setting them up in Nepal and Sri Lanka, we are thinking about all of those as actually hybrid programs.

Dilshan Fernando:

Okay, I have a – Sharada, you have a question?

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Well, you know we can throw both the questions and then you know the speakers can answer them together, I think in the interest of time. My question is more to Haroon, and maybe, you know I mean because Professor Rengaswamy is also an academic, he can also speak to that.

I think one of the things when I started off, when I was doing my PhD, you know you're always - or for someone who's doing research in India; you know a lot of journals in the West, because of the subscription costs, a lot of institutions in South Asia simply do not subscribe to these journals. So that's one part of the problem.

The other part of the problem is also, that you know when I do research on a topic in India for example, some of the presentations that we listened to this morning, I think you know they have to be in journals like the Economic and Political Weekly, which kind of has got such massive circulation. But that is not recognized in the West.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

That's true.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

As you know, it doesn't come into your highly qualified, highly ranked journal, right. So, I mean we are not addressing the issue of inequality, you know in the way especially Western Academia operates. And we are all then forced to publish in journals and avoid journals that might have far greater impact. So, I mean it might be a comment, but it'd be interesting to hear both of your thoughts on that.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

Well, I mean, you're perfectly right in indicating that around the world there are regionally specific journals which can be very, very important, but which have global metrics which are low or not recognized at all. Obviously, the Economic and Political Weekly is an absolutely first-rate journal, which for some reason the rest of the world's academy and social sciences doesn't seem to recognize.

But also, you know there are a number of very good regional journals out of South Africa which have very, very low rankings and are which are very good for those who are in the region. What

I would say is, if there's a journal that's important within the region in which you are working, and it doesn't have these sorts of metrics but you want to publish in that journal; the main thing is that when it comes time to present your work, not to an academic audience but to a potential employer, the employer has to be made aware of the fact that this is an important journal in the region.

So, this is one of the things that I do in my letters of reference when students publish in regionally important journals, which an appointment committee will not be aware of, and whose impact factor is low if or non-existent. I think it then behooves the referee to point out to the appointment committee that that journal is actually very important, even though they've never heard of it. And this is something that can come about as a result of a dialogue between the student and the referees.

And it's not something which is very difficult to do, but it then points out that not every important journal is something which neatly fits into that box of "this is important". And once you get published in the more demanding, high quality journals from various regions of the world, it also becomes somewhat easier to get into the more prestigious, globally oriented journals.

And in some ways, I shouldn't even say globally oriented journals, because the vast bulk of these come from the United States and they're very American-centric. And if they're not coming from the United States, they're coming from the United Kingdom. And the UK journals do take a more of a global perspective than those from the United States, but they still take a perspective which is very much biased towards the developed world, the North, rather than the world.

When they talk about the world in the UK, they're normally talking about North America, and Western Europe and Australia, they're not even talking about Japan, right? So, it is a very partial view of what quote unquote the world is.

Dilshan Fernando:

Did you have any comments, Dr. Rengaswamy?

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

I don't know, I can speak but you'll keep time I'm assuming. So, I think things are going to change and they'll continue to change. The importance of some journals before, I think internet became very pervasive was, I think these are the few journals which will be there in all libraries.

So, in chemical engineering for example, everyone will be desperate to publish in an American Institute for Chemical Engineers, because if a university were to buy one journal in chemical engineering physically, that's the first thing they will buy.

So, if you wanted extreme dissemination of your idea, you had to go to these journals. But I think with internet, and with easy access and the digitization of these journals, I think it's a lot more about keyword searches for you to pick the paper out, right?

In fact, when I teach my students, before I was starting you know publishing this best place, and then you're done, because your paper will be read. Now, I think you really think about what keywords you use; how do you position your paper so that when someone searches - it's like search engine optimization, right. Your paper comes out on top, and someone reads it.

So, in some sense I think this is going to make it a little bit more of a level playing field. But, you know, academicians for being bright and at the same time, it takes them a long time to change and change the thinking about how you do things, right?

So, we have been told how to publish in Science and Nature, we will keep running towards Science and Nature without thinking about people reading your papers, and so on. So, I find this dichotomy really amazing, that a group of such bright individuals will still have such herd mentality when they are telling everyone else that they have heard mentality, right?

So, this is a very interesting thing. And I think as more and more academicians think about this and do things better, I think this disparity will come down. And I believe you can find the best paper in some place which you have not thought about, or most appropriate for your work, so it's important to keep this in mind.

Dilshan Fernando:

Yeah, yeah. So, I just have one question - I think we are going beyond time. Recently, I think beginning of the fall semester here, they did a Twitter poll with PhD students: What is one piece of advice for incoming PhD students?

The highest ranked was have an academic website for each PhD student. That was the ranked number one. That means, basically to exist in the internet. [Laughs]. So, my question - I've been rejected by the Canadian Journal of Development Studies, and I hope it was not you Dr. Akram-Lodhi [Laughs]. But, I've got harsh comments recently from a European journal on an order for a paper that had awards.

So, my question to you is, I think kind of a naïve question, is that maybe I thought that you do research, you write a paper, and then look for a journal that is appropriate it looks like; based on your comments about, you know, understanding the tone of their journal and you know making a good enough paper. Is it that we find the journal first and then tone your paper down for that channel?

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

Well in some ways, I mean, this builds upon other comments that were made earlier. I mean, if you know the journals that are important in your field, and there are particular journals that you'd like to publish in; you should be aware of the formatting, commonalities that you see in the structure and argumentation, and the use of evidence, and things like that.

And therefore, you should be thinking towards which journals do you want to publish in, rather than writing, because you will have to adjust what it is you are publishing to the particular journal. And we used to see this a lot. We used to get, in the Canadian Journal of Development

Studies, we used to get a lot of submissions particularly from North Africa, from people who clearly had never ever looked at the journal, and then sent us something on the gas sector in Algeria as a viable export-oriented business for the private sector.

And it had no development content in it whatsoever. So, that's really, really important to know where you're publishing, and be aware of that. And I would stress, you know being rejected is not the end of the road for a paper. You know, there's a hierarchy of journals: there's those which are very good and much more difficult to get in, there are those that are mid-range, those which are low range.

Many of those which are lower range, but which have an impact factor, you still get good quality papers in them. So, think about, "If I'm rejected by one particular journal, where else might this fit?" We all get rejected. Everyone gets rejected. The issue is, can you find ways of publication? And, I think not everything, almost everything I've ever initially submitted has finally been published somewhere.

Right. It's just a question of keeping at it. If it's good enough that you think it's going to be published, then you can publish it. On the issue of having an academic website, the usefulness of the academic website goes back to the issue around open access. You can upload your final pre-proofed or pre-print version of your article, journals will always let you do that. And then you can circulate this amongst your research community, and that isn't very different to the article that you're going to eventually publish - and that way people can get access to your article.

But, on the comment on the Twitter poll; the most important thing to do, going into a doctoral program, I think in 2022, it's not having a website - I think it's the most important thing is publish while you are doing your dissertation. Do not wait until you finish. In my generation, the classic thing was finish your dissertation three articles out of your dissertation. That's not how it works anymore. If you look at the high demand academic programs in development studies, in my field, in development studies and economics of development; at a place like where Sharada got her doctorate, where I used to work at the ISS.

A good PhD student finishes their doctorate with five peer-reviewed publications now, five. And I mean, if you've got nothing and you're going up and competing against someone who's already got five and is even not finished - it's not a level playing field. So, publish. The key thing now is publish while you are studying.

Dilshan Fernando:

Do you have any comments Dr. Raghunathan?

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Sure. So, I think one of the most important things that you pick up from the last answer is, everyone gets addicted. I still remember reading an article from someone who had just got the MacArthur grant, which is called the Genius Grant, and then he wrote saying:

“Once I got this grant, everyone started thinking that I'm a genius. And these people who are next door to me, until then, they didn't know I was genius. But more importantly, they also started thinking that everything that I write gets published, and everything I write gets funded.”

And he said nothing can be farther away from the truth. So, Dilshan, if this is what happens to a MacArthur genius, I don't think we should worry about rejection. So it's important to remember that. And one other thing I really believe, I've always believed in this, that if your work is of high quality; it's probably a necessary condition to get published in a real good place, but that is not a sufficient condition to get it published in a place that you want to be published, right?

Because every journal has a certain orientation, certain way of writing in the paper, which you have to learn by writing to the journal multiple times. And then, in my experience, for example, I used to think of this journal *IEEE, Transactions on Automatic Control*. I am a chemical engineer, it's very mathematical. I said it's absolutely impossible to get into the journal, right?

I wrote the first two, three papers which got rejected, then finally I realized it was not the content, it was the way it is written, the way you formulate it. You learn that, and then you start getting accepted and then your paper will at least definitely go for a review. Right, you get to that stage. So, getting accepted in a good place is a combination of learning to write for the journal, of course having a high-quality journal paper in itself, and there are various other issues.

So, I think you should not think of rejections of papers as a reflection on quality. And I think again, the other very important thing that Haroon said is, most of what we write, if it's of good quality, it's going to get published somewhere. And having the perseverance and then really looking at the first knee-jerk reaction when you get a reviewer's comment is saying, oh God, the fellow didn't understand anything of what I have written.

But that's not true, because most of the people do review on a protocol basis. There is no reason to be so. It's a service that people do, so I always take the best out of the reviews. And do I learn something from the review, and then I try to make the paper better. And then send it, to again, a good place for a publication. That's what I would say.

Dr. Haroon Akram-Lodhi:

Just one final comment. Anecdote. Stephen Brown at the University of Ottawa tells this story, and that is, he had a paper which he thought was fantastic and it was rejected five times in a row by different journals. Each time he revised it. When it was finally accepted by the sixth and was published, it then became, and it now remains his most cited publication. So.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you so much.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

So, don't give up, basically.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you so much. Thank you so much for all of you, for being here. Thank you so much, Dr. Akram-Lodhi. Thank you so much, Dr. Rengaswamy, for being here. With that, I think we'll close this session as well as close the conference. We've had three wonderful days, yeah? Thank you so much and have a good day.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Thank you.

Dr. Sharada Srinivasan:

Yeah. Thank you very much, the audience, Haroon, and Raghu, if I can call you that. And to Dilshan, our PhD candidate who brought this fantastic conference and panels together, and to Jeevan, who's our tech support student volunteer. So, thank you very much, and we hope to make this recording available through the CIRCLE website. I think there will be a lot of interest in the things that both of you have had to say in this panel. So, thank you very much and enjoy the rest of the weekend. Take care, bye.

Dr. Raghunathan Rengaswamy:

Thank you.

Dilshan Fernando:

Thank you.

[End of transcript]