

SHARP Board Recommendations on Publications Policies and Practices

7 September 2018

SHARP's Constitution places authority over publications with the Executive Council (EC) in Article VII. The Board's role is to "to advise and oversee the work of the Executive Council, whose duty is to manage the affairs of the Society" (Article II; www.sharpweb.org/main/constitution/). Recognizing this, and the fact that SHARP's editors have the best understanding of the details of their jobs, the Board has articulated its positions below in the form of principles which we believe should be binding (indicated in italics), paired with examples of how the EC might choose to implement those principles, ideally in close consultation with SHARP's editors. In many cases, the principles we recommend and practices we suggest may already be implemented among specific SHARP publications, in which case we trust our recommendations will simply affirm existing best practices.

Part 1: The Board's recommendations on recent points of discussion about publications

Uniformity. *There should be uniformity among all of SHARP's publications, but that uniformity should be defined at the level of principles and standards, comparable to those of other scholarly societies (including those of the American Council of Learned Societies).* For example, specific editorial structures, policies, practices, and procedures for peer review may differ among SHARP's publications, given their distinct natures, histories, and purposes. But all SHARP editors should nonetheless meet the same high standard of fairness, collegiality, and professionalism in their interactions with authors, publishers, reviewers, readers, SHARP officers, and others.

Editorial structure of *Book History*. *Editors of all SHARP publications, as per the Constitution, report to the Director of Publications and Awards and serve at the pleasure of the EC, whose Policy Manual sets out and may alter particulars for each publication as needed. In light of *Book History*'s reputation, scope, history, and recent editorial practice, the journal should aim to have three editors, with pre-determined, staggered six-year terms to ensure continuity, with a lifetime maximum of two terms. (See Part 3, below.)* Among the three editors there should be diversity in terms of subject and period expertise, geographic representation, and methodological and disciplinary background. We also recommend that the EC consult with the editors of the other SHARP publications and specify in the Policy Manual the lengths and structures of editorial terms.

Appointment process. *An Appointments Committee should be struck to make a recommendation to the EC when any appointed positions need to be filled (including editorships but also other positions such as archivist). Each Appointments Committee should have representation from the EC, Board, and specific stakeholders, but also include a mechanism for representation from the general membership.* For example, an Appointments Committee for a new SHARP editor could include Board members, the Director of Publications and Awards, and a non-Board/non-EC member of SHARP—all in voting roles. However, that same committee should also have an incumbent editor from the same publication in a non-voting role, to be included in all of the committee’s discussions.

Part 2: The Board’s position on editorial independence and accountability

Editorial independence is a cornerstone of scholarship, and the decisions made by editors acting within the normal scope of their roles must be respected. However, independence is not complete autonomy: all SHARP editors must understand the role of their publication within SHARP as its parent organization, whose evolving intellectual, methodological, and disciplinary scope will—and should—be an ongoing challenge and opportunity for us all. Because of this scope, editorial decisions for SHARP’s peer-reviewed publications (such as whether to desk-reject a submission or send it for full peer-review) should be made collaboratively, either within editorial teams or with editorial advisory board members. Different SHARP publications may implement this principle in different ways to manage their workload. For example, a journal editor might draw upon the expertise of the journal’s Advisory Editors for second opinions on such questions.

The editors of all SHARP publications report to the Director of Publications and Awards (DoPA), and together, the editors and the DoPA are accountable to the EC and ultimately the membership, and should view regular reporting as a normal part of their roles. For example, where relevant, editors should present annually to the DoPA (and record in their annual report for the AGM) statistics on submission, acceptance and rejection rates, desk-rejections, author demographics, and peer review outcomes. The DoPA should also be present at annual review and strategy meetings and should have access—exercised judiciously—to editorial statistics via ScholarOne or another editorial management system. Another example of this principle in action is that editorial correspondence should take place within a system like ScholarOne, to ensure accountability but also continuity in the event of a sudden disruption in any editor’s ability to serve.

Part 3: The Board's recommendations on current editorships

Editorial term limits are vital to the health of a scholarly publication, especially within a society as diverse as SHARP. Term limits ensure the participation of new editors, and are essential for SHARP's long-term ability to respond to changes in the field. For these reasons, term limits enact a principle as vital to SHARP's publishing endeavors as other foundational principles such as editorial independence, editorial accountability, and peer review. Although we recommend allowing for a diversity of practices among SHARP's publications (which may include different editorial term lengths), a twelve-year lifetime maximum editorial term limit should apply to all SHARP publications. Given the importance of this principle, we recommend that it be implemented retroactively across all SHARP publications, with immediate effect.

The twelve-year term limit will require a change to Article VII in the Constitution, which currently provides for indefinitely renewable two-year terms, and it also has direct consequences for *Book History*. The only SHARP editor currently serving for longer than twelve years is Jonathan Rose, under whose guidance over the past twenty years *Book History* has become an eminent scholarly journal in the field.

In recognition of Jonathan's two decades of service and leadership as *Book History* editor, the Board recommends that he, along with co-founder Ezra Greenspan, who stepped down after sixteen years' service in 2014, be credited as honorary "Founding Editors" in future issues of *Book History* and on the SHARP and Johns Hopkins University Press websites. The Board believes *Book History* will continue to thrive with its remaining current editors, Beth le Roux and Greg Barnhisel. The Board further recommends that an Appointments Committee be struck immediately to search for a third *Book History* editor.