



# Where do we publish? Journals chosen by Canadian geographers, 1999–2001

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## Introduction

Geographical scholarship in Canada is extremely diverse. Our research interests are eclectic, and we publish in many different forums, including a host of refereed journals. Refereed journal articles are by no means the only way to disseminate scholarship, and for some kinds of research they are not even the best way. Nevertheless, for many academics the refereed journal article is the gold standard because of its importance to funding agencies and tenure and promotion committees. Thus, patterns of refereed journal article publication can say a lot about a field. They reflect the aggregate decisions of individuals, yet provide insight into the direction in which the field as a whole is moving.

Unfortunately, what the pattern means is not always clear. For instance, concentration in a small number of similar journals within a field may mean insularity, or it may be reflective of a vigorous community of researchers with a focused vision of their discipline. In this editorial, I present an analysis of journal article publication patterns of Canadian geographers during a three-year period (1999–2001) and compare the pattern to those in two other disciplines, economics and geology/earth sciences. The implications for geography as a discipline are somewhat murky, but they may confirm the inchoate fears of those who believe that the discipline has no centre.

## The Database

Computerized journal indexes make it possible to analyse publication patterns quickly and systematically. To reveal patterns of journal selection in geography and in the two comparison fields, economics and geology/earth sciences, I analysed articles published between 1999 and 2001 in journals catalogued in the ISI *Web of Science* database.

Using the following search criteria, 962 articles were identified in *Web of Science*: (1) items had to be journal articles; (2) they could be written in any language; (3) their publication year had to be 1999, 2000, or 2001; and (4) at least one author had to be based in a Canadian department or school of geography (e.g., Department of Geography, School of Geography and Geology). Comparable databases were created for the disciplines of economics and geology/earth sciences.

*Web of Science* catalogues articles published in approximately 8,600 journals in the social sciences, humanities and natural sciences. To be catalogued by *Web of Science*, journals must meet criteria relating to the following: timeliness of publication; adherence to international editorial conventions; provision of English-language article titles, abstracts and keywords; use of the peer-review process; international diversity; and editorial content (the extent to which journals contribute new

knowledge to fields).<sup>1</sup> Other indexes exist, such as the *Geography* index (a subset of GEOBASE) published by Elsevier, but *Web of Science* was the best choice for this analysis.

*Geography* does index some specialised geography journals that *Web of Science* misses (e.g., *Gender, Place and Culture*, *Ecumene/Cultural Geographies*, *Tourism Geographies*, and *New Zealand Geographer*). Nevertheless, a search of *Geography* using the above criteria identified fewer articles than the comparable search of *Web of Science* (568 versus 962). It is also worth noting that in *Geography*, only three articles appeared in *Gender, Place and Culture* during the study period, and none appeared in the other three journals. Some newer geography journals are catalogued in neither index (e.g., *Social and Cultural Geography*, which started publication in 2000). *Geography* catalogued slightly more French-language articles. As noted above, *Web of Science* only catalogues journals if they provide English titles, key words and abstracts. On that basis, *Web of Science* catalogued 29 French-language articles from journals such as *Géographie Physique et Quaternaire*, but did not capture articles from *Géographie et Cultures*, *Cahiers de Géographie du Québec*, or *Hommes et Terres du Nord*. *Geography* catalogued all four journals, and thus identified nine articles that were not catalogued by *Web of Science*.

Even though *Geography* does a slightly better job of capturing some of the highly specialised or local geography journals, including French-language journals, *Web of Science* is the better index for this kind of search. Not only did it catalogue 70 percent more articles than *Geography*, suggesting that it does a better job of capturing the full range of journals in which Canadian geographers publish, but it also permits direct comparison to two other disciplines using consistent search rules, something that cannot be accomplished using indexes from different vendors.

## Where Do We Publish?

Canadian geographers publish in an extremely wide range of journals. The 962 articles published between 1999 and 2001 appeared in 303 different journals. Of these 303 journals, just over half (160)

1 The ISI *Web of Science* master journal list, along with the selection criteria used to choose journals, is available on the ISI's Web site.

**Table 1**

Geography journals containing ten or more articles

Journal Title	Number of Articles
<i>The Canadian Geographer-Le Géographe Canadien</i>	61
<i>Hydrological Processes</i>	42
<i>Canadian Journal of Earth Sciences</i>	26
<i>Atmosphere-Ocean</i>	20
<i>Water Resources Research</i>	19
<i>Earth Surface Processes and Landforms</i>	17
<i>Journal of Geophysical Research-Atmosphere</i>	17
<i>Social Science and Medicine</i>	17
<i>Géographie Physique et Quaternaire</i>	16
<i>Holocene</i>	14
<i>Environment and Planning A</i>	13
<i>Geomorphology</i>	13
<i>International Journal of Remote Sensing</i>	13
<i>Permafrost and Periglacial Processes</i>	13
<i>Quaternary Science Reviews</i>	13
<i>Journal of Hydrology</i>	11
<i>Physical Geography</i>	11
<i>Canadian Journal of Forest Research</i>	10
<i>Canadian Journal of Remote Sensing</i>	10
<i>Quaternary Research</i>	10

published only one article with an author based in a Canadian department or school of geography during the study period. Only 20 journals had 10 or more articles (Table 1). With 61 articles, *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien* was the most popular journal, followed by *Hydrological Processes*. Importantly, 182 of the 962 articles in the geography group were published by authors out of McMaster University's School of Geography and Geology. Many of these were written by people on the 'geology' side of the school (one geologist alone appeared as an author on 25 articles), which somewhat distorts the importance of certain journals in Table 1. Nevertheless, the pattern clearly shows a high level of diffusion among journals.

Because many geographers work with people from different disciplines, it should not be surprising to see that they often publish their articles in nongeography journals. This may partly account for the large number of different journals that geographers chose for their work. However, this is not the only reason. Of the 962 articles in the geography dataset, just over one-fifth (205) had sole authors (Table 2). These 205 articles appeared in 113 different journals, 80 of which had only one article each. Thus, even on our own, we publish in a large number of different journals.

**Table 2**

Sole versus multiple authorship in geography

Number of Authors	#	%
One	205	21.3
Two	335	34.8
Three	178	18.5
Four or more	244	25.4
Total	962	100.0

## How Do We Compare to Other Disciplines?

Is the pattern of publication in geography different from other fields? For purposes of comparison, I chose economics and geology/earth sciences (Table 3). In some respects, the pattern of publication in economics is similar to that of geography: some concentration, but a lot of diversity. However, in one very important respect, the pattern is quite different: all 12 of the journals that had 10 or more articles were clearly 'economics' journals (i.e., 'economics' was in the title), and most of the remaining journals were either economics journals or had some obvious connection to economics. In comparison, the journals in which geographers publish seem almost to have been drawn randomly from the journals catalogued in *Web of Science*.

In geology/earth sciences, there was much more concentration than in geography and economics. Not only were there fewer journals relative to the number of articles published (Table 3), but also there was more concentration in these journals. Of the 37 journals that had 10 or more articles, 17 had 20 or more. The largest number of articles per journal was 109, but the second largest

number was 99. As was the case for economics, the majority of the journal titles clearly signalled that the work they contained was 'geology/earth sciences' research. Thus, in comparison to the discipline of geography, the disciplines of economics and geology/earth sciences seem to have a much stronger core of common journals.

## Implications

What, if anything, does this analysis say about the discipline of geography? Are we an eclectic community of scholars with diverse interests, making important contributions to knowledge in a wide variety of fields? Or are we a discipline of convenience, with no core and few connections to each other? Geographers have long wrestled with questions relating to the nature of the discipline (e.g., Johnston 1985). One particularly fruitless avenue of inquiry involves considering whether or not a particular subject is or is not 'geography'. That is not the issue highlighted here. Instead, this analysis reveals what I consider to be an important—and potentially negative—characteristic of our discipline: the tendency of individual geographers to be extremely outward-focused.

Richard Groop and Randall Schaetzl (1997) suggest that an 'outward' orientation is a desirable trait, referring to departments that show this in their publication patterns as 'cosmopolitan'. While insularity is not desirable, it is nevertheless disquieting that Canadian geographers—especially those on the human side of the discipline—appear to have so little to say to each other and, perhaps, so little in common except in small, specialised groups. Even with the numerous differences that distinguish researchers in the two other fields examined, it is

**Table 3**Publication patterns in geography, economics and geology/earth sciences (1999–2001 inclusive)<sup>a</sup>

Indicator	Geography	Economics	Geology/Earth Sciences
Total number of articles published	962	606	1,399
Number of journals	303	188	273
Number of journals with 10 or more articles	20	12	37
Number of journals with only one article	160	98	134
Maximum number of articles in a single journal	61	31	109

<sup>a</sup> There is some overlap between geography and geology/earth sciences because 182 of the articles in each group had an author from the School of Geography and Geology at McMaster University, and these articles appeared in both groups.

clear that a core group of 'economics' and 'geology/earth science' journals exists and provides a meeting ground for members of the discipline. The same cannot be said for geography. Cohesiveness does increase as one subdivides the discipline. For example, physical geography—even with the diversity of topics people investigated—seems to be much more cohesive than human geography. Physical geographers are almost solely responsible for the small amount of concentration that occurs. In contrast, aside from *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, which publishes all kinds of geographical research, only two 'human' geography journals appear in Table 1: *Social Science and Medicine* and *Environment and Planning A*.

Within their specialised niches, geographers *are* making important contributions to knowledge. They may even be the anchors for important interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary research areas. Thus, the concerns I have raised here may seem unwarranted. Yet I cannot help but think that a big

part of the reason for why people outside the discipline often do not understand what goes on in the discipline of geography is that geographers themselves do not understand either. With new, even more specialised journals appearing each year, it seems likely that the pattern revealed here will only intensify. Aside from making it even more difficult for tenure and promotion committees to assess the quality of a particular contribution, this trend may further reduce the exchange of ideas *within* the discipline.

## References

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