Jotwell Mission Statement

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The Journal of Things We Like (Lots)–JOTWELL–invites you to join us in filling a telling gap in legal scholarship by creating a space where legal academics will go to identify, celebrate, and discuss the best new legal scholarship. Currently there are about 350 law reviews in North America, not to mention relevant journals in related disciplines, foreign publications, and new online pre-print services such as SSRN and BePress. Never in legal publishing have so many written so much, and never has it been harder to figure out what to read, both inside and especially outside one's own specialization. Perhaps if legal academics were more given to writing (and valuing) review essays, this problem would be less serious. But that is not, in the main, our style.

We in the legal academy value originality. We celebrate the new. And, whether we admit it or not, we also value incisiveness. An essay deconstructing, distinguishing, or even dismembering another's theory is much more likely to be published, not to mention valued, than one which focuses mainly on praising the work of others. Books may be reviewed, but articles are responded to; and any writer of a response understands that his job is to do more than simply agree.

Most of us are able to keep abreast of our fields, but it is increasingly hard to know what we should be reading in related areas. It is nearly impossible to situate oneself in other fields that may be of interest but cannot be the major focus of our attention.

A small number of major law journals once served as the gatekeepers of legitimacy and, in so doing, signaled what was important. To be published in Harvard or Yale or other comparable journals was to enjoy an imprimatur that commanded attention; to read, or at least scan, those journals was due diligence that one was keeping up with developments in legal thinking and theory. The elite journals still have importance – something in Harvard is likely to get it and its author noticed. However, a focus on those few most-cited journals alone was never enough, and it certainly is not adequate today. Great articles appear in relatively obscure places. (And odd things sometimes find their way into major journals.) Plus, legal publishing has been both fragmented and democratized: specialty journals, faculty peer reviewed journals, interdisciplinary journals, all now play important roles in the intellectual ecology.

The Michigan Law Review publishes a useful annual review of new law books, but there's nothing comparable for legal articles, some of which are almost as long as books (or are future books). Today, new intermediaries, notably subject-oriented legal blogs, provide useful if sometimes erratic notices and observations regarding the very latest scholarship. But there's still a gap: other than asking the right person, there's no easy and obvious way to find out what's new, important, and interesting in most areas of the law.

Jotwell will help fill that gap. We will not be afraid to be laudatory, nor will we give points for scoring them. Rather, we will challenge ourselves and our colleagues to share their wisdom and be generous with their praise. We will be positive without apology.

Tell us what we ought to read!

How It Works

Jotwell will be organized in sections, each reflecting a subject area of legal specialization. Each section, with its own url of the form sectionname.jotwell.com, will be managed by a pair of Section Editors who will have independent editorial control over that section. The Section Editors will also be responsible for selecting a team of ten or more Contributing Editors. Each of these editors will commit to writing at least one Jotwell essay of 500-1000 words per year in which they identify and explain the significance of one or more significant recent works – preferably an article accessible online, but we won't be doctrinaire about it. Our aim is to have at least one contribution appear in each section on a fixed day every month, although we won't object to more. Section Editors will also be responsible for approving unsolicited essays for publication. Our initial sections will cover administrative law, constitutional law, corporate law, criminal law, cyberlaw, intellectual property law, legal profession, and tax law — and we intend to add new sections when there is interest in doing so.

For the legal omnivore, the 'front page' at Jotwell.com will contain the first part of every essay appearing elsewhere on the site. Links will take you to the full version in the individual sections. There, articles will be open to comments from readers.

The Details

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