

Theological Librarianship Talks Open Access

Religious Studies Journals in Beall's List

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As was widely reported in the scientific and academic press in mid-January of 2017 (e.g., Inside Higher ED,¹ Retraction Watch,² and Nature.com³), “Beall’s List,” the well-known and controversial online blacklist of so-called “predatory” open access publishers and journals created by University of Colorado-Denver librarian Jeffrey Beall, was suddenly taken down. By Beall’s own account in the *Biochemica Medica* article, his online Scholarly Open Access blog was taken down under “intense pressure from my employer, the University of Colorado Denver, and fearing for my job.”

Although the blog has been officially removed from the web, I found cached versions of Beall’s “List of Publishers”⁴ and “List of Standalone Journals”⁵ using Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. The latest page captures are dated January 11, 2017, and reflect content updated by Beall on December 31, 2016. (A cached copy of Beall’s List has also been posted here.)⁶

Others can comment more specifically on the efficacy of Beall’s List. I was curious to discover if and to what degree his List includes religious or theological studies journal content in order to assess the problem of “predatory open access journals” in these disciplines.

Methodology

Between August 7-11, 2017, I reviewed all 1,163 links on Beall’s “List of Publishers”⁷ and I browsed his “List of Standalone Journals”⁸ for titles related to religious or theological studies. For the purpose of the survey, I excluded dead or broken links, and links that returned “access forbidden” or server timeout errors. (I recognize that some of the timeout errors may have been generated by Wayback Machine.) I then reviewed journal lists for relevant titles on each publisher or journal site. For the purpose of the survey, I excluded broad multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary, generic humanities, philosophy, area studies (e.g., East Asian), and cultural studies journals unless they included explicit reference to religion or religious studies. I also abandoned any sites that attempted to send me their journals list as a downloadable file.

I created a table listing journal title, ISSN, publisher, location, journal-level editor and editorial board, whether peer-reviewed, whether there was any content (at least one article), if the journal is current, the contact method, and if the journal charged an author publication fee (APC).

Findings

The vast majority of the publishers on Beall’s List are related to science, technology, medicine, or business, though many also include humanities and social sciences journals. As indicated on the table, I identified sixty-seven journal titles from twenty-six publishers related to religious or theological studies. Of the twenty-six publishers, the journals from ten (marked with *) were largely duplicated by similar sounding titles (the websites looked very similar and the Author Guidelines were virtually the same in all cases). Only one of the journals from these ten “publishers” had any article content.

¹ <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/01/18/librarians-list-predatory-journals-reportedly-removed-due-threats-and-politics>.

² <http://retractionwatch.com/2017/01/17/bealls-list-potential-predatory-publishers-go-dark/>.

³ <https://www.nature.com/news/controversial-website-that-lists-predatory-publishers-shuts-down-1.21328>.

⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111172306/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>.

⁵ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111172309/https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/>.

⁶ <http://beallslist.weebly.com/>.

⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111172306/https://scholarlyoa.com/publishers/>.

⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170111172309/https://scholarlyoa.com/individual-journals/>.

A vast majority of identified journals did not have assigned ISSNs (though I did not confirm the validity of those that did). Actual publication location of many journals was suspect because complete addresses were not supplied, and contact information was limited to a generic email address. All the journals claimed to offer peer review prior to publication, though most lacked a journal-level editor or editorial board. Most indicated (though some did not) that an author APC would be charged for articles submitted and/or accepted for publication — typically in the \$150-300 per article range.

Of the sixty-seven journals titles identified, only twelve (18 percent) had any article content (at least one article; highlighted in green). Most of the other titles indicated in one way or another that their ISSN was pending, and they were trying to attract both editors and authors. Of the twelve titles with any content, only six had both an ISSN and an identified editor or editorial board. Four can be considered current with content published in 2016.

One journal, *Ideal Journal of Psychology and Theology* (highlighted in yellow) had two articles, though neither related to either psychology or theology. Another similar title, *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (also highlighted in yellow), appears to have been hijacked from a journal of the same name⁹ published by Biola University. Although the content, editor, and editorial board information differs, the bogus version actually uses Biola’s address and phone number on its contact page.

Assessment and Conclusion

In the context of Beall’s List as a whole — which encompasses thousands of journal titles oriented primarily toward science, technology, medicine, or business — religious or theological studies journals comprise a very, very small percentage. Further article-level evaluation of the twelve journal titles with content might reveal legitimate research, which could call into question their presence on Beall’s list. Fifty-five out of sixty-seven (82 percent) of the identified titles (including ten titles from the ten very similar looking “publisher” websites) that had no content whatsoever suggests a passive effort to attract authors looking for a publishing venue and possibly to extract publication fees, though to date they apparently haven’t been very successful. For example, the publisher Journal Network, which launched in 2014, has only published three articles in just three of twenty-four of their Religious Studies titles.

Although I believe Beall has correctly identified a problem with “predatory journals” in the open access publishing space that is worthy of our concern (leaving aside that some of his criteria may simply reflect a prejudice against non-western academic traditions and methods), my survey results lead me to conclude that the specter of the predatory journal is outsized by actual reality in religious and theological studies. No scholar should publish research in a venue that hasn’t been properly evaluated and vetted. But as a part of that evaluation process, no scholar should allow the mere specter of the problem to prejudice the general validity of open access as a legitimate model of scholarly communication. Fortunately, there are many other open access journals in religious and theological studies that didn’t get singled out on Beall’s List. These can and should be seriously considered as venues of high-quality scholarly research communication.

Religious Studies Journals identified from the last update (December 31, 2016) of Jeffrey Beall’s “List of Publishers” and “List of Standalone Journals” webpages as cached on Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine											
	Journal Title	ISSN	Publisher	Location	Editor	Editorial Board	Peer Review	Content	Current	Contact	APC
1	<i>American Open Religions Journal</i>	--	Research and Knowledge Publication*	New York	Y	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$300
2	<i>Asian American Religions Research Journal</i>	--	Asian and American Research Publishing Group*	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$200
3	<i>British Open Journal of Religions</i>	--	British Open Research Publications*	Birmingham, UK and New York	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$200

⁹ <http://journals.biola.edu/jpt>.

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	Journal Title	ISSN	Publisher	Location	Editor	Editorial Board	Peer Review	Content	Current	Contact	APC
4	<i>Canadian Open Religions Journal</i>	--	Canadian Research Publication*	Toronto, Canada	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$300
5	<i>European Open Religion Journal</i>	--	European Union Research Publishing*	Birmingham, UK and New York	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$300
6	<i>European Journal of Science and Theology</i>	1842-8517	Ecozone	Romania	Y	Y	Y	Y	December 2016	Yahoo email	200-350 Euro
7	<i>Ideal Journal of Psychology and Theology</i>	2067-7720	Ideal True Scholar	Nigeria	N	N	Y	Y**	January 2016	publisher email	\$60
8	<i>International Journal of African Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	Y	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
9	<i>International Journal of Agnosticism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	Y	April 2015	webform	\$145
10	<i>International Journal of American Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
11	<i>International Journal of Asian Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	Y	January 2015	webform	\$145
12	<i>International Journal of Astrology</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
13	<i>International Journal of Atheism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
14	<i>International Journal of Bahá'í Faith</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
15	<i>International Journal of Buddhism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	Y	October 2014	webform	\$145
16	<i>International Journal of Christianity</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
17	<i>International Journal of Comparative Religion</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
18	<i>International Journal of Cultural and Religious Studies</i>	--	CARI Journals	Kenya	Y	Y	Y	N	--	email	\$125

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	Journal Title	ISSN	Publisher	Location	Editor	Editorial Board	Peer Review	Content	Current	Contact	APC
19	<i>International Journal of Divinity</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
20	<i>International Journal of European Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
21	<i>International Journal of Hindi Research</i>	2455-2232	Gupta Publications	India	Y	Y	Y	Y	December 2016	address, phone, email	?
22	<i>International Journal of Hinduism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
23	<i>International Journal of Islam</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
24	<i>International Journal of Jainism & Jaina</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
25	<i>International Journal of Judaism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
26	<i>International Journal of Latin American Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
27	<i>International Journal of Middle Eastern Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
28	<i>International Journal of Mythology</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
29	<i>International Journal of Neopaganism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
30	<i>International Journal of New Age Beliefs</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
31	<i>International Journal of Pacific Island Religions</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
32	<i>International Journal of Pastoral Counseling</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages

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33	<i>International Journal of Philosophy and Theology</i>	2333-5769	American Research Institute for Policy Development	Madison, WI	Y	Y	Y	Y	December 2015	webform	\$200
34	<i>International Journal of Religion</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
35	<i>International Journal of Religion</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
36	<i>International Journal of Religious Mysteries</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
37	<i>International Journal of Religious Studies</i>	1352-4623	FSSH Scholarly Journals	New York	Y	Y	Y	Y	2016	publisher address, phone, email	Not OA
38	<i>International Journal of Sikhism</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
39	<i>International Journal of the Shintō Religion</i>	--	Journal Network	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	webform	\$145
40	<i>International Open Journal of Religion</i>	--	Academic and Scientific Publishing*	New York	Y	N	Y	Y	April 2014	publisher email	\$300
41	<i>International Research Journal of Religious Theology</i>	--	Spring Journals	?	N	N	?	N	--	webform	?
42	<i>Journal of African Religions</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
43	<i>Journal of Buddhism</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
44	<i>Journal of Chinese Folk Religion</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
45	<i>Journal of Church History</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages

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46	<i>Journal of European Folklore Research</i>	2148-189x	MacroWorld	UK and Turkey	Y	Y	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	?
47	<i>Journal of Hinduism</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
48	<i>Journal of Homiletics</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
49	<i>Journal of Islamic Perspective and Culture</i>	2148-9403	MacroWorld	UK and Turkey	Y	Y	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	?
50	<i>Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture</i>	2333-5904	American Research Institute for Policy Development	Madison, WI	Y	Y	Y	Y	December 2016	webform	\$200
51	<i>Journal of Jainism</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
52	<i>Journal of Liturgy</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
53	<i>Journal of Pastoral Theology</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
54	<i>Journal of Psychology and Theology</i>	--	Hijacked title name from Biola University	?	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
55	<i>Journal of Religious and Cultural Studies</i>	--	Research Institute for Science, Technology and Society	?	?	?	Y	?	?	?	?
56	<i>Journal of Religious Education Techniques</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages

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57	<i>Journal of Religious Studies, Buddhism and Living</i>	--	CRESCO	India	Y	Y	Y	Y	2016	publisher email	?
58	<i>Journal of Sikhism</i>	--	International Organization of Scientific Research and Development	India	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher address, phone, email	\$129, additional charge for +6 pages
59	<i>Multi International Hindi e-Research Journal</i>	2278-5965	Multi International Hindi e-Research Journal	India	Y	Y	Y	N	--	phone, email	no
60	<i>North American Open Religion Research Journal</i>	--	North American Research Publishing*	Canada and USA	Y	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$200
61	<i>Research Open Journal of Religion</i>	--	Science and Technology Publishing*	New York	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$300
62	<i>TLEP Journal of Religious and Cultural Practices</i>	--	The Leading Edge Journal Publishing Company	Nigeria?	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	?
63	<i>Universal Open Islamic Studies Journals</i>	--	Adyan Academic Press*	USA	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$200
64	<i>Universal Open Religion Journal</i>	--	Adyan Academic Press*	USA	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$200
65	<i>US Open Religions Journal</i>	--	American Research Publications*	USA	Y	Y	Y	N	--	publisher email	\$300
66	<i>VFAST Transactions on Islamic Research</i>	2309-6519	Virtual Foundation for Advancement of Science and Technology	Pakistan	Y	Y	Y	Y	December 2015	publisher address, phone, email	N
67	<i>World Academic Research in Religion Studies and Human Rights</i>	4131-221x	World Academic Research Journals	UK, Nigeria, Ghana	N	N	Y	N	--	publisher email, webform	?

NOTES

* All publisher websites essentially the same

** Two articles, not related to journal scope