

LEADING ARTICLE

Beall's List is Problematic and Dead! Should it be Taken Seriously?

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Three years ago, I wrote a post about Beall's list, available from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2989209. A problematic website devoted to blacklisting Open Access Journals. But, as some time had passed and this website had been taken down, I decided it would be best to go forward, I knew I would one day be asked about Beall's list, and a few weeks ago, I received an email from Professor Abdulghani Alsamarai, editor-in-chief of the Aalborg Academy Journal of Medical Sciences (AAJMS), who brought my attention to that Beall's list, a backup of it exists on the internet archive which is of course not being updated, is still used to an excessive extent in some developing countries, in particular Iraq, for decisions of assessing research and researchers and hiring and promoting academics, and asked me if I could possibly write another article on this problematic list. After some time, I agreed to write an editorial on the subject mainly to increase depth of understanding and encourage ideas, and I'm pleased I have done that.

Before I jump to presenting my opinion, let me first provide a brief background to support it. We all know that there are definitely journals who fail to take peer review seriously and charge scholars large publication fees for the privilege of publishing their works in print or online version or both. Also, we all know that there are journals who charge readers hefty fees to access journal content. But this is not what I'm talking about. I am talking about the fact that there are many Open Access Journals (OAJ) with a solid peer-review policy, produce top or high quality research, make its content publically available to the readers on the internet, and charges reasonable article processing fees but they were being unfairly included in the list. This context enhanced doubt about Beall's list originality.

I still think that Beall tried to make a great impression on his list by using the word "predatory" and he probably chose to overlook the difference between "predatory journals" from "low-quality journals" while listing more than 1000 journals and classify them as Potential, possible or probable predatory scholarly open-access publishers, as discussed elsewhere, for example (HoomanMomen, 2015 [1]; Claire Shaw, 2013 [2]). "Predatory journals" is one thing, and "low-quality journals" is another. Low-quality research production does not make a journal "Predatory". Really it doesn't. A journal can be "predatory" and "low-quality", or "high-quality" but "non-Predatory", and can be "Predatory" and "high-quality", too.

The meaning of the word “predatory” didn’t actually connote what Beall thought it did. Linguistically, the word “predatory” refers or denotes to a person or group that charges too much or exploits others for personal gain. According to this definition, “predatory” is analogous to “fee-based open access journals” and “levying page charges” models adopted by a number of famed journals that were not included in Beall’s List”, a clear example of Beall’s double standards.

I don’t claim to be correct, but do claim the correct to come out with questions for others to answer: Did Jeffrey Beall support this claims with enough/strong evidence? Was Beall’s list a recognized authority in evaluating scholarly journals? Did it have any affiliation to any governing body or organization accredited to scholarly publishing? More importantly, did it have any legal authority or academic value? I really hope all of you reading this will think of these questions and find answers on this matter as this would help us to evaluate the quality of the list and decide for ourselves whether or not to support or rely on Beall’s list for whatever purpose desired.

It would of course be wonderful to protect academic scholarly publications if Beall’s list was true—or even parts of it, but we couldn’t judge just how bad or low quality or even how “predatory” those blacklisted journals were from those not included in the list. Given this context about the argument, Jeffrey Beall faced wave of criticism from several authors, for example, Walt Crawford (2014)[3] said that “Beall had tunnel vision, only going after open access journals even though traditional closed access journals print a lot of crap, too”, and Karen Coyle (2013)[4] argued that “Beall was biased against journals/publishers from the developing world”. Phil Davis (2013)[5] observed that “Beall is falsely accusing nearly one in five as being a potential, possible, or probable predatory open access publisher on appearance alone...Beall should reconsider listing publishers on his list until he has evidence of wrongdoing”. In fact, Jeffrey Beall didn’t provide any sufficient proof or explanations for everything he did. We wanted to know which criteria each blacklisted journal met or failed to meet. We also wanted to know the accuracy of the criteria used to blacklist those journals and publishers in the list as we can find several low quality and massive charge-fee journals not included in the list. Also, we wanted to know if there were any criteria for assessing a journal’s research quality and if these criteria were also effective with drawing sufficient evidence for a journal’s inclusion on and exclusion from the list. The fact remained that Beall worked as an individual person and didn’t follow any methodological approach, Beall’s evaluation criteria was invalid and unreliable; he relied mainly on (i) email messages (spam emails) that a bunch of scammers used to send to him and also on (ii) comments that readers used to leave on his blog post.

The answer to my post’s title question is simply no. Beall’s list shouldn’t be taken seriously. There are many criteria for assessing research and researchers and for choosing the right or the best journal for your work, and “Beall’s List” is not one of them. To assess or evaluate an academic work, simply ask experts from the same field to read and review it. If a researcher chooses a low quality journal and other experts in the field read the (published) wok and see it as potential contribution to scholarship or verify it as satisfying certain standards, then nothing predatory occurred. To choose or to asses an academic journal for your research work, it is

useful to find out information about the relative quality of a journal either by using the programs Publish or Perish and Scopus to obtain data on the impact factor and citation rate of journals in a particular area of research; by accessing Web of Knowledge or Science through your institution to obtain rankings of the journals in a particular area; or by visiting the journal's website to find out information about the journal in question, or checking the index by DOAJ and JCR.

I may take the liberty of considering Beall's list as a new form of academic mafia, trying to forward Beall's own business with the famed journals and publishers despite its usage and intentions, and also to discourage the emergence of new publishers and journals. Regardless of whether this post is correct in its claim about Beall's list, at least what does emerge from it is that I will hopefully make the academic community in the developing countries aware of the obvious sweeping generalizations of Jeffrey Beall's criteria supported with no evidence to blacklisting Open Access Journals to help readers to pause and consider, before they choose, decide and act. Some readers may campaign against using Beall's list as a criterion for journal quality or academic hiring and promotion. Others may believe that Beall's list was useful but not perfect. Others may want Beall's list to improve or create something better. Those in the academic community might not feel sad to see Beall's list go since it lacked scientific rigour and validity.

Yet, I have no way of knowing how much Beall's list is biased towards traditional closed access journals and pay-access publishing models at the expense of open access journals. I simply have to distrust Beall's list on what constitutes a subjective, non-transparent, non-inclusive, and inconclusive criteria for including a journal or publisher on his list.

I recommend my dear valued readers to go through Friends of Open Access. www.scholaryoa.net. and Scholarly Open Access/Critical Analysis of Jeffrey Beall's Blog Open Access publishing to expose the truth about Jeffrey Beall and his list.

References

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