

# The Journal Club Toolkit

The  
Toolkit

Journal Club  
Toolkit

What?

- What is a journal club?

How?

- A step by step approach to setting-up a journal club
- Reflection piece on setting up a Journal Club at the University of Ibadan

Why?

- Why set up a journal club initiative?

# What?

## What is a Journal Club?

Based on a summary article written by Yetunde John-Akinola, Tope Erinoshio and Mojisola Oluwasanu based on setting up a Journal Club at the University of Ibadan.



### INTRODUCTION

#### JOURNAL CLUB:

PhD Journal Club (JC) (which some might refer to as PhD seminars) are forums whereby PhD students can meet together to discuss about their PhD research, PhD life, the PhD journey or as we used to referred to it when I was a doctoral student ... 'PhDing'.

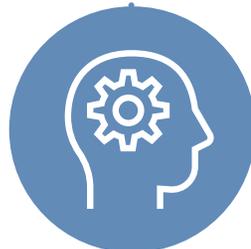
PhD Journal Club or seminars can be either formal or informal discussions. Giving it the term 'seminar' usually connotes some form of formality while 'JC' makes the setting a mix of formal and informal, which could be a more conducive/relaxing environment for PhD students in terms of expressing their views about their research or research capabilities/incapabilities.

### EXPERIENCE

My first exposure to PhD Journal Club was when I was a doctoral student myself at the Health Promotion Research Centre, National University of Ireland, Galway. I was introduced to this monthly meeting of doctoral students in my first year and I found it very interesting and engaging from the beginning.

It was coordinated and directed by one of the doctoral students, and we all shared the task and took turns to facilitate the meetings once a month. The monthly facilitator gave a presentation on a pre-chosen topic and shared useful materials relating to the topic with other students.

### BACKGROUND



### IMPROVEMENT

#### STRENGTHEN

The meetings included doctoral students from year 1 to year 4 so topics chosen were agreed by all as beneficial for all PhD students irrespective of year of programme. Doctoral students in the 3rd or 4th year could also share information or materials that would be helpful for those in 1st or 2nd year. Part of the Journal Club schedules included invited guests (e.g. lecturers or university researchers) presentations.

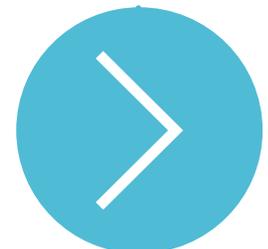
The time allotted for JCs was flexible in order to accommodate the timing of all students - usually at break time or a time suitable for everyone.

This inclusive nature is a fundamental element of Journal Clubs.

### EXPLORE

- Why set-up a Journal Club?
- Form to assist with assigning topics to students to facilitate based on research interests.

### LINKS



# Why?

## Why set-up a Journal Club?

Based on a summary article written by Yetunde John-Akinola, Tope Erinoso and Mojisola Oluwasanu based on setting up a Journal Club at the University of Ibadan.



### WHERE TO START

### JOURNAL CLUB

I went to the University of Ibadan, Nigeria after my PhD with the enthusiasm to establish a Journal Club for doctoral students and discussed this idea with the faculty. Several attempts had been initiated to establish an informal forum like this for students, but it just never took off. Because there was no formal structure to support starting the Journal Club meetings yet, I and another colleague started informal discussions with doctoral students on their research needs and support.

### CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

We continued to pursue the idea of a Journal Club because we knew how helpful it would be for capacity development of our doctoral students and a forum through which they could expand their knowledge base, gain much needed skills and especially share experiences that all could benefit from. This dream was real and I and Dr. Oluwasanu, my colleague, were not going to give up on it. In the meantime, we continued to employ every avenue to informally support the doctoral students.

### SHARING



### LEARNING

### SUPPORT:

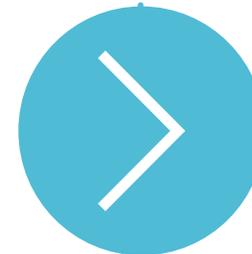
We believe Journal Clubs are important for doctoral students because being a doctoral student has a lot of challenges attached to it and pressures are always high. Students need as much support as they can get and especially somewhere to go to, even if it is only once a month, where they can 'release' some of the pressure through experience sharing, learning and skill development. Our Journal Club meetings encourage all students to ask any question - "there is no right or wrong question" - we are all 'learners' - we just realign a wrong perspective about any topic of discussion.

### EXCHANGE

It is also a forum for students and faculty to keep abreast of the latest research studies and methodological approaches to support their work, and a way to stimulate discourse among students and faculty.

We believe the Journal Club creates an opportunity to provide students with hands-on learning regarding other general skills that they may not necessarily be receiving as part of their doctoral training (e.g. etiquette of power point slides). It could also be an opportunity for students to learn about career trajectory of others which can also inform their own choices.

### SKILLS



# How?

## How to set-up a successful Journal Club

Below are steps that can help in initiating a Journal Club, based on the experiences of authors Yetunde John-Akinola, Tope Erinosho and Mojisola Oluwasanu in setting up a Journal Club at the University of Ibadan.



### WHO?

#### ROLES:

- 1. Identify potential collaborator(s)/ faculty who are interested in setting up or facilitating a Journal Club.**  
This is an important first step; the interest and passion of the Journal Club coordinator is critical to a successful start-up and its sustainability.
- 2. Outline the purpose and meeting structure for the Journal Club**  
Define the ground rules and expectations of and for students, as well as the roles that faculty and students take on during Journal Club meetings – this must be very clear and set out from the beginning.  
  
A participatory approach is essential throughout the process of planning, implementing and evaluating Journal Club meetings – faculty and students must work together to ensure a sense of ownership and sense of belonging among the students from the beginning.

### MEETINGS

- 3. Identify a suitable time and dates to conduct Journal Club meetings.**  
Both faculty and students should allow flexibility of timing to accommodate everyone if a change of time is required.  
  
Journal Club meetings should be at least once a month. Meeting times for Journal Club should normally not exceed 75 minutes in order to ensure sustained concentration and interest of all members.

- 4. Develop a semester-long schedule.**  
This should include topics and facilitators. Send documents/articles ahead of the meeting including the discussion points. This allows student facilitators and faculty enough time to prepare for meetings.

- 5. Set-up medium to facilitate communication.** Share discussions in real time among Journal Club members. Examples could include, WhatsApp, group email, web portal and so on.

### WHEN?



### WHERE?

#### LOCATION:

- 6. Identify a suitable location for your meeting.** A conducive and well-ventilated setting/room will make the meeting more relaxed. Also, other facilities such as projector, laptop, electricity, internet access should be planned ahead of the Journal Club meetings.

**Tip:** Do not have the classroom arranged in a classroom style, with chairs facing forward. But instead arrange in a U shape or round table that allows all to face one another and engage in discussions.

Refreshments could be provided, or students can bring their lunch if the meeting is at the lunch hour.

### COORDINATION

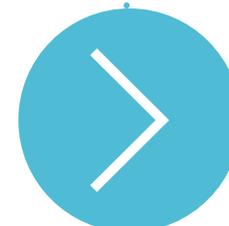
- 7. Solicit both faculty and institutional commitment/support for sustainability of the Journal Club.**  
The faculty coordinating team should have at least bi-monthly meetings on structure and format of Journal Club - it could be informal meetings.

- 8. Designate a student volunteer/ representative to coordinate Journal Club meetings with the faculty.** Be willing to expand the scope of the Journal Club beyond your faculty – this includes expanding membership to other interested students or inviting resource persons outside the faculty.

- 9. Devolve leadership** and empower the students to conduct the JC meetings irrespective of the availability of the JC Coordinator/Faculty. **Use this form** to assist you with allocating topics.

- 10. Aim to eventually 'wean' the JC coordination away from 'faculty led' to a strongly student-led meeting.** Faculty can however continue to act as the JC mentors.

### FORMAT



# How?

## How to set-up a successful Journal Club

A reflection on the experiences of authors Yetunde John-Akinola, Tope Erinoshio and Mojisola Oluwasanu in setting up a Journal Club at the University of Ibadan.



### BACKGROUND

#### GETTING STARTED:

In the summer of 2018, our department hosted a visiting Carnegie Fellow, Dr. Erinoshio, a Research Assistant Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the USA. One of Dr. Erinoshio's goals was to introduce advanced research methods into the postgraduate curriculum, which could be developed into a Journal Club.

She broached the idea at a faculty meeting and had the buy-in and approval to initiate the process with help from the authors. Planning for the Journal Club started in June 2018 and an outline for the Journal Club meetings was developed. This was shared with the doctoral students and feedback was invited about topics they would like to have covered.

The meeting dates and times were set and communicated to the doctoral students with a full year schedule of student facilitators drawn.

### PURPOSE

We had our first meeting in July 2018 and met about three times to discuss the outline for the Journal Club. The purpose of the Club is to:

- Keep students abreast of recent research in public health and health promotion
- Engage them in critical discussions of research methodologies
- Create a conducive environment where students can express their needs, share experiences and help each other

We wanted to create a forum that students would always look forward to attending and bring challenges to share, resolve and learn from.

At the start of the initiative, a full-year schedule was drawn with topics assigned to students based on their research interests. A list of criteria was developed by the coordinating faculty to guide students in selecting articles for each Journal Club meeting

### AIMS



### WHERE?

#### LOCATION:

The Journal Club meetings took place twice a month in the first year but have been scaled down to once a month (9:30 am on the Third Thursday of each month).

They are held in a conference room at the Department of Health Promotion and Education at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

The meetings last about 1hr 15 minutes split in two segments- the first segment lasts about 45 minutes and is student-led while the second segment lasts 30 minutes and is led by one of the coordinating faculty.

A week before each meeting, the student-facilitator selects an article, sends it to the coordinating faculty for approval, after which the article is shared with the rest of the doctoral class. The student facilitator also develops a list of questions to guide the group discussion during the meeting.

### MEETINGS

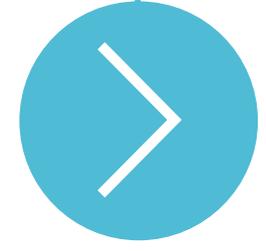
Each meeting begins with the student facilitator providing a brief overview about the purpose of the study focused on the selected article. He/she uses questions to facilitate group discussion and critique of the selected article and methodology and real-life application to developing countries like Nigeria.

The second segment of the meeting is led by one of the coordinating faculty or an invited guest around a general topic. This segment of the meeting is meant to be interactive with active participation by faculty and students. Topics that have been discussed in this segment include etiquette of power point presentations, plagiarism, how to use Mendeley referencing software, and a discussion on challenges encountered by doctoral students regarding their research studies with suggestions on how to navigate challenges.

We also share information about international funding and scholarship opportunities and support doctoral students with their research.

At each meeting, we also provide refreshments to the students.

### FORMAT



# How?

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### FOLLOW-UP

#### REVIEW:

Students have been very engaged during the meetings and even provided positive feedback about the experience. I, Dr. Oluwasanu and Dr. Erinoshio have continued to coordinate the Journal Club meetings together for more than a year. We have had 10 meetings since we started and an evaluation (a mix of formal and informal) of the Journal Club meetings quarterly.

### ADAPTATIONS

In order to mitigate several challenges we have faced in having consistent Journal Club meetings (such as disruptions in calendar due to university staff strike actions that sometimes last for months; some students living outside the city and having to travel 2 to 4 hours to attend meetings), we set up a WhatsApp Group Chat which makes communication easier and faster.

We also use this forum to pass across important information and share ideas; students can also ask questions that cannot wait until another meeting. In response to student request and feedback, in June 2019, approximately one year after the PhD Journal Club begun, we switched from bi-monthly meetings to monthly meetings and have students' learning requests into the meetings.

### Challenges



### WHERE?

#### LOCATION:

We continually discuss among us faculty and with students, ways in which we can improve and extend our impact beyond our department. Some of the areas in which we have experienced challenges or have hindered progress and suggestions for improvement are highlighted below:

- The support of an online resource platform, would improve and strengthen our Journal Club allowing greater student engagement.
- Opportunities for remote connection e.g. purchasing WiFi for the group to allow external guests such as Dr. Erinoshio in the USA to call in via Skype.
- A dedicated projector and solar UPS for uninterrupted power supply.

We also plan to encourage students from other departments to attend once or twice per semester program for a specific topic- or even an invited guest. We envisage a roundtable discussion with opportunities for the students to ask questions especially career related questions or research.

### SUGGESTED TOPICS

- 1. Enhance skills for writing competitive grant proposals and peer-reviewed manuscripts**  
E.g. research grant/proposal writing, how to write/design literature review for PhD thesis, publications and manuscript submission, becoming a peer reviewer, best practices in writing scientific articles, innovative and critical thinking and writing, training on good writing and presentation skills.
- 2. Build analytical SPSS quantitative software and NVIVO qualitative software capacity**  
E.g. what statistical tests to use in research- practical instances, sample size calculations, qualitative data analysis, secondary data analysis, learning statistical packages such as SPSS, NVIVO.
- 3. Career development opportunities including fellowships, scholarships etc.**  
E.g. how to source grants/apply for funding for research projects and exchange programs in the field, how to access fellowships and conferences.
- 4. Other capacity development needs**  
E.g. time management and interpersonal skills, quality research mentoring and supportive career guide, need for a PhD counsellor in most schools, project management, budgets, team-work training, leadership, entrepreneurial skills, and teaching skills development.

### Feedback

