



Limina — The Journal of UAP Studies

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Editorial

Mark Rodeghier
Editorial Board

*Author contact: markrodeghier@comcast.net

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Dr. Cifone, *Limina* Editor-in-Chief, has written an introductory Editorial that is wise, insightful, and that places this new scholarly enterprise into the history of the study of UFOs/UAP¹ and its treatment by academia. He has explained precisely why a field of UAP Studies is necessary if we collectively are to make progress (necessary, though not yet sufficient given the various limitations that still hamper UAP research).

My editorial contribution to this first volume is to provide some historical and personal perspective to the launching of *Limina*, based on my long involvement with the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and several other UFO organizations.

The frustrations of those who were engaged in substantive, non-dismissive studies of UFOs were pervasive in the early days, as established journals would not publish articles that were anything but dismissive. An article that epitomized this was published in *Science*, no less (Warren 1970), making the claim that UFO witnesses were “status inconsistent.” The evidence for this was not close to persuasive², and Warren later revised his ideas and moved away from his hypothesis, but *Science* had published it. Dr. J Allen Hynek and I later discussed how he had tried to interest the editors of various journals in a UFO paper but was rebuffed although he was the scientist with the longest sustained engagement with the data.³

It was not impossible to publish research that was at least neutral on the UAP subject. A social science paper still worth reading today was published in the journal *Social Studies of Science* (the flagship journal in the sociology of science and technology, the field in which I received my Ph.D.) by Ron Westrum (1977) on the “social intelligence” about UFOs, explicating how information about UFOs was generated and disseminated, to the public, but especially to the scientific community, and the barriers to its acceptance.

It is true that Westrum’s article was not about UAP but the social organization surrounding their study, and so acceptable to a social science

1 I shall use both the acronyms UFO or UAP as appropriate for the context or historical era to which I refer.

2 Not persuasive, among other reasons, because most witnesses were not status inconsistent, only some!

3 Hynek is seen, not altogether unfairly, as someone who was slow to recognize that there was an unexplained UFO phenomenon that demanded serious study. Yet he early on presented a talk, and then published it, for the Optical Society of America (Hynek 1953) that argued that “nocturnal lights” – his first use of this term which became a category in his UFO classification scheme in 1972 – were not readily explainable.

journal. In our nascent field of UAP Studies the remit should likewise be any serious inquiry into topics in the umbra, or penumbra, of UAP. Who sees UAP, how are they reported, what effect do the experiences have on witnesses (psychological, physiological, or even spiritual) are all fair game, along with studies that focus, as Dr. Cifone mentions, on how consciousness may be implicated in the UAP subject.

Although it took much perseverance, it was also just barely possible to publish research on the physical characteristics of UAP in this era, as Maccabee (1979) did in his analysis of bright objects filmed off the coast of New Zealand on Dec. 31, 1978. His success was the exception to the academic rule about UAP: research in favor of existing paradigms is welcomed; research that challenges those paradigms is not only rejected, it often won't even be reviewed.

This state of affairs was intellectually intolerable, especially because the closing of Project Blue Book led in the 1970s to the first sustained study of UFOs by scientists and professionals from a range of disciplines. Without the Air Force's ongoing project, academics who nonetheless had not been discouraged by years of negative messaging were emboldened to grapple with the subject. As a result, publication outlets were necessary, and so Hynek, and CUFOS, rose to the challenge and founded the *Journal of UFO Studies* (*JUFOS*⁴) in 1979. The goals were modest as there was no hope of becoming affiliated with a journal publishing house. The intent was to publish a peer-reviewed journal with the best current work being done, whether in the social or physical sciences. In that it did succeed. What it did not accomplish was to create a viable financial model that could sustain publication (once per year). CUFOS struggled financially in the early 1980s, and so did *JUFOS*, and only three volumes were published before publication ceased in 1983.

Once again, there was no outlet for serious work that would undergo a rigorous vetting and that was supported by a reputable, albeit UFO, organization.⁵ The first to step into this gap was the Society for Scientific Exploration, with the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (*JSE*), founded in 1987. *JSE* quickly became a welcome place to publish UFO-related research, along with research notes and book reviews (and I've been fortunate enough to have a long tenure as an Associate Editor).

When I became Scientific Director of CUFOS shortly before Dr. Hynek's passing in 1986, I initiated a review of current activities with the intent of increasing our connections to the academic community, and also helping promote serious research. It became clear that resuming publication of *JUFOS* was a high priority, and after the necessary preparation we subsequently published the first volume in the New Series in 1989.

For any journal, the editor and editorial board are critical to its success, and my experience shows this to be even more so in a field such as UAP studies. Articles are sometimes promising and come from those who today we label "citizen scientists," and sometimes require more encouragement and editorial assistance compared to submissions at more established journals, and the editors must be willing to work on that basis. We were fortunate that two accomplished scholars and persons of dedication and suitable temperament accepted the role as Editor in the second run of *JUFOS* (Michael Swords and Stuart Appelle). Given the importance of peer-reviewed publications, I consider my role in re-establishing *JUFOS* as one of my key accomplishments in my ufological career.

After publishing nine volumes, the last in 2006, we hit two serious snags. The one that is familiar is funding. We were still primarily hard-copy based, and general support for UFO groups began dwindling in the late 1990s, in part because of the rise of the internet. But the new, and discouraging problem, was the dearth of serious work that could withstand peer review. For a variety of reasons, though not funding for research (because there has always been practically zero funding for research, so that is a constant), while ufology ground on in the first decade of this century, and some quality work was being done, it often resulted in books or something other than a research paper (for example, the volume by Swords and Powell *et al.* 2012). Realistically, there weren't enough papers to be spread between two journals (*JSE* and *JUFOS*), so we made the painful decision to once again cease publication.

Then came December 2017 and the *New York Times* article that kicked off, along with the Navy videos, the current upwelling of UAP interest among the public, media, and politicians, and importantly, many academics who took a fresh look at UAP and saw, quite frankly, what they had overlooked all these years. So (almost) everything has changed, as we

4 All volumes of *JUFOS* are now available digitally on the CUFOS website at [Journal of UFO Studies - Center for UFO Studies \(cufos.org\)](http://Journal of UFO Studies - Center for UFO Studies (cufos.org))

5 Mention should be made of the combined publishing effort of *UPLAR Research in Progress* and *UFO Phenomena International Review* that appeared in Europe at around this same time, sponsored by a consortium based in Italy. These journals were serious efforts to publish quality work (their appearance at this same time is no coincidence as the same factors were at work in Europe as in the United States), but they faced similar barriers and had limited impact.

have entered what I call the “new modern era” of UAP investigation (the period before 1947 is conventionally the pre-modern era, and from June 24, 1947 with Kenneth Arnold’s famous sighting, the modern era began – one I thought might outlast me).

JSE is thriving under a new editor, who assumed that role in 2022, yet since 2006 there has been no dedicated journal for UAP-focused research. Publication in established journals is always a worthwhile target (see Knuth *et al.* 2019 or Medina *et al.* 2023 for recent examples), if UAP work can be tied into the disciplinary interests represented by a particular journal, or submitted to a journal that publishes on a range of subjects, and the work can overcome the continuing stigma associated with the field – which is declining but hardly exponentially.

Established academic fields/disciplines are, appropriately, studying topics that have collectively by a scholarly community been defined as comprising that field, are worthy of study, and likely to move the field forward towards its empirical and theoretical goals. UAP qua UAP don’t fit comfortably in any field – although there are some, such as atmospheric physics, in which a subset of the UAP data should have long ago found a welcoming home. Still, I expect that more papers related to UAP will be published in existing journals, and that is a good thing.

A good thing, but not enough. As Dr. Cifone has so incisively discussed, the field of UAP studies is only now establishing itself, gaining the intellectual heft and organizational resources to become “devoted to the scholarly research and analysis of these phenomena in their own right – research and analysis, moreover, that is not necessarily governed by existing disciplinary frameworks but which seeks those proper to its subject.” To fulfill that mission statement, a journal becomes *sine qua non*, and *Limina* is the vehicle to establish the space for our nascent field to respond to the even more pressing question today than before: what are UAP?

I truly am grateful to be involved with *Limina*, and its supporting organization SUAPS, and so from the first to now latest effort to publish a peer-reviewed journal, and thus to provide a through line from J. Allen Hynek to today in 2024. The prospects for *Limina* are bright, as they are for the re-invigorated field of UAP studies. Personally, I don’t quite have the energy that I did when I was first volunteering with CUFOS in the mid-1970s. My excitement about the future, though, matches and exceeds the expectation we had then, when UAP research was making strides it had not before. May *Limina* “Live long and prosper” in this new modern era.

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