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The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment

On December 16, 2012, a group of editors and publishers of scholarly journals gathered at the Annual Meeting of The American Society for Cell Biology in San Francisco, USA, to discuss current issues related to how the quality of research output is evaluated and how the primary scientific literature is cited.

The impetus for the meeting was the consensus that impact factors for many cell biology journals do not accurately reflect the value to the cell biology community of the work published in these journals; this also extends to other fields in the biological sciences, such as developmental biology. The group therefore wanted to discuss how to better align measures of journal and article impact with journal quality.

There is also an alarming trend for the citation of reviews over primary literature, driven in part by space limitations that are imposed by some journals. As this contributes to lower citation indices for journals that focus mainly on primary literature, the group discussed ways to combat this trend as well.

The outcome of this meeting and of further discussions is a set of recommendations that is referred to as the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, published in May 2013. The recommendations are listed below, or you can read the entire declaration here: <http://www.ascb.org/dora/>.

The Company of Biologists (COB) and its journals *Development*, *Journal of Cell Science*, *Disease Models & Mechanisms*, *The Journal of Experimental Biology* and *Biology Open* fully support this initiative. In concordance with the recommendations, all COB journals provide the impact factor alongside a variety of other journal-based metrics; request an author contribution statement for all research articles; place no restrictions on the reuse of reference lists; and have no limitations on the number of references. The COB is also working with its online host, HighWire, to provide a range of article-level metrics.

It is our hope that this initiative will help to ensure that research assessment remains informed and fair.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment recommendations

General recommendation

1. Do not use journal-based metrics, such as journal impact factors, as a surrogate measure of the quality of individual research articles, to assess an individual scientist's contributions, or in hiring, promotion, or funding decisions.

For funding agencies

2. Be explicit about the criteria used in evaluating the scientific productivity of grant applicants and clearly highlight, especially for early-stage investigators, that the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.

3. For the purposes of research assessment, consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

For institutions

4. Be explicit about the criteria used to reach hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions, clearly highlighting, especially for early-stage investigators, that the scientific content of a paper is much more important than publication metrics or the identity of the journal in which it was published.

5. For the purposes of research assessment, consider the value and impact of all research outputs (including datasets and software) in addition to research publications, and consider a broad range of impact measures including qualitative indicators of research impact, such as influence on policy and practice.

For publishers

6. Greatly reduce emphasis on the journal impact factor as a promotional tool, ideally by ceasing to promote the impact factor or by presenting the metric in the context of a variety of journal-based metrics (e.g. 5-year impact factor, EigenFactor, SCImago, *h*-index, editorial and publication times, etc.) that provide a richer view of journal performance.

7. Make available a range of article-level metrics to encourage a shift toward assessment based on the scientific content of an article rather than publication metrics of the journal in which it was published.

8. Encourage responsible authorship practices and the provision of information about the specific contributions of each author.

9. Whether a journal is open-access or subscription-based, remove all reuse limitations on reference lists in research articles and make them available under the Creative Commons Public Domain Dedication.

10. Remove or reduce the constraints on the number of references in research articles, and, where appropriate, mandate the citation of primary literature in favor of reviews in order to give credit to the group(s) who first reported a finding.

For organizations that supply metrics

11. Be open and transparent by providing data and methods used to calculate all metrics.

12. Provide the data under a licence that allows unrestricted reuse, and provide computational access to data, where possible.

13. Be clear that inappropriate manipulation of metrics will not be tolerated; be explicit about what constitutes inappropriate manipulation and what measures will be taken to combat this.

14. Account for the variation in article types (e.g. reviews versus research articles), and in different subject areas when metrics are used, aggregated, or compared.

For researchers

15. When involved in committees making decisions about funding, hiring, tenure, or promotion, make assessments based on scientific content rather than publication metrics.

16. Wherever appropriate, cite primary literature in which observations are first reported rather than reviews in order to give credit where credit is due.

17. Use a range of article metrics and indicators on personal/supporting statements, as evidence of the impact of individual published articles and other research outputs.

18. Challenge research assessment practices that rely inappropriately on journal impact factors and promote and teach

best practice that focuses on the value and influence of specific research outputs.

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