

EASE-Forum Digest: September to December 2015

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Is peer review in the social sciences easier than in the applied sciences?

Pippa Smart asked, "Is peer review easier in applied sciences (where the methodology, results and analysis are checked) than in social sciences (where the argument and logic are checked)?" In Andrew Davis' experience of reviewing and writing in the applied sciences, logic and argument were indeed checked as a matter of routine. It was interesting to hear what Will Hughes had to say about this as a variety of types of articles are submitted to his journal *Construction Management and Economics*. The journal's board found that social science articles were held to a higher standard of methodological arguments and theoretical positioning and argument than applied science articles. The board had to work hard to ensure that all papers met the same standards and carefully select referees to make sure quantitative scientists did not let through material that would not hold its own against that of a qualitative researcher.

Eric Lichtfouse noted that peer reviewers in environmental studies were faced with the problem that reproducing exact conditions of research, eg relating to agricultural plots in another place, was often impossible because of the number of variables. I asked my son, a political scientist, what he thought of the question. He considered it outdated or in need of amendment as many manuscripts in social sciences use a lot of statistics, when reviewers also have to check the results and methodology. In his view, political science fell into both categories and ideally peer review should seek to speak to both dimensions. But it was not about an easy dichotomy, rather about reviewers being asked to focus on different aspects given their fields' priorities. Pippa also told me later that she felt her question had perhaps been badly phrased. What she had meant to ask is whether other editors found it harder to get reviewers to objectively critique discursive articles that challenged their (or established) opinions than to get them to evaluate articles that reported factual research.

Problems with authors withdrawing articles

A second question raised by Pippa was how journals deal with authors withdrawing papers after review and provisional acceptance or when the articles were in proof. She also asked how journals dealt with authors failing to respond to emails after review and acceptance, forcing the journal to drop the article. The question was posed on behalf of an open access journal with a low impact factor that does not charge authors. The authors who withdrew were suspected to be using the journal as a "first review" service and then taking their articles to higher impact journals, which wasted reviewers' and editors' time and, if the articles had been typeset, costs.

Pippa thought another explanation was that authors could not be bothered to make the corrections requested upon a provisional acceptance.

The journal wondered if asking the authors to pay a reviewing fee or banning them from future submissions if they failed to provide a valid reason for their withdrawal could resolve the problem. Aleksandra Golebiowska recognized these withdrawal problems. Staff at her journal suspected that when this happened the authors had submitted to a number of journals simultaneously and one of the other journals had been quicker to accept the manuscript. Sylwia Ufnalska pointed to the EASE Form for Authors (<http://www.ease.org.uk/publications/ease-form>). Authors who signed the form agree to publication of their paper in the journal and certify that the paper is not considered for publication elsewhere. Aleksandra considered such a statement, which she thought to be standard, would not deter authors intending to act unethically.

Regional excellence in research, Spanish translation of open access guide and why an author withdrew

Karen Shashok kindly posted the following interesting URLs on the forum.

1. "Defending Regional Excellence in Research or Why Beall is Wrong About SciELO", published by Phill Jones on Scholarly Kitchen: <http://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2015/08/10/defending-regional-excellence-in-research-or-why-beall-is-wrong-about-scielo/>. She quoted his last sentence, "There is a real danger that the current tone in the discussion of predatory publishing could lead to a guilt by association of all publishers based in the non-English speaking world and that would not only be entirely unfair, but damaging to the public good."
2. The freely available Spanish version of Peter Suber's book on Open Access (MIT Press, 2012): <http://ri.uaemex.mx/handle/123456789/21710> (click on ACCESO ABIERTO para repositorio (1).pdf). The book was translated by EASE member Reme Melero and includes an excellent Introduction on OA in Latin America written by Indrajit Banerjee, Dominique Babini and Eduardo Aguado.
3. An explanation by Jonathan Eisen (at Tree of Life, brother of Michael at It is NOT Junk) of why he withdrew his name as coauthor of an article published in *Science* even though he planned and wrote the paper: <http://phylogenomics.blogspot.com.es/2015/10/removing-my-name-from-author-list-of.html>
4. URLs discussing the resignation of *Lingua's* editorial board (See the News section on page 23).

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