

Publishing the Most Important Work in the Life Sciences

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[Abstract]

Biologists are faced with a range of options to publish in journals that vary dramatically in scope and selectivity. Scientific societies such as the American Society for Cell Biology, the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, the National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society of London wish to promote the scholarly interests of their members and other scientists and rely on academic members of the community to edit and review all submissions. Many society journals have moved to an all-electronic format and thus are not limited to a fixed number of pages or articles per issue. Commercial journals are generally managed by professional editors and for the most part remain bounded by a print model that restricts the number of pages and articles per issue. Society and commercial journals are funded through subscriptions paid by host institutions and page charges covered by the investigator. A new option, Open Access publication, relies on author fees or support by external foundations.

Life science scholars often rely on the perceived importance of a publication venue as reflected in the numeric “impact factor”. This flawed measure gives undue influence to a minority of papers that generate large numbers of citations that boost the appearance of impact for papers that may generate few citations. Many scientific societies and life science scholars have urged that the use of impact factor be reduced or eliminated in considering the scholarly contributions of junior and senior colleagues (<http://am.ascb.org/dora/>)

In an effort to create a new venue for the most important contributions in the life sciences, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Wellcome Trust and the Max Planck Society have joined forces to create a new journal, eLife. The premise of eLife is to return the decision making process to active scientists in an Open Access forum where work is judged in a consultative manner and the author is given clear decision without the need for many rounds of time consuming and expensive revisions. At eLife, all editorial decisions are made by an internationally distinguished group of scientific editors. With generous support from the founding agencies, authors are able to publish work with no page charges for the next several years. Read about the journal and sign up for eLife alerts (<http://www.elifesciences.org>).