Preprint Submissions to Journals: What's Your Policy?

MODERATOR:

Helen Atkins

Senior Manager, Journal & Product Support
American Chemical Society
Washington, DC

SPEAKERS:

Darla Henderson

Publisher, Global Journals Development
Assistant Director, Open Access Programs
ACS Publications
Washington, DC

Allison Leung

Senior Editor, Social Science Journals
SAGE Publishing
Thousand Oaks, California

Laura Remis

Assistant Managing Editor, Science Advances
American Association for the Advancement of Science
Washington, DC

REPORTER:

Becky Rivard

Associate Production Editor
American Mathematical Society
Providence, Rhode Island

Many authors—in both the sciences and humanities—are submitting to online preprint platforms. In fact, more people read these than the accepted publications, perhaps because they are available earlier or perhaps because they are open access. Some stakeholders embrace preprint servers, while others have reservations. In this talk, three scholarly publishing professionals spoke on the pros and cons of working with preprint systems, as well as the challenges involved in creating and updating policies around preprints and preprint submissions.

First, Darla Henderson of the American Chemical Society (ACS) talked about the chemistry community's need for a preprint system and how ACS worked with fellow societies Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) and the Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker (GDCh) to launch, support, and develop the service. Preprints and accepted articles both have merits: disclosure and rapid dissemination in the former, and validation through peer review in the latter. In the end, the three societies decided to create a community preprint server as part of their core values of being community-driven. Their preprint server, ChemRxiv, also has a direct journal transfer option so that authors can then easily submit to any ACS, RSC, or GDCh journal, if they choose.

Next, Allison Leung talked about SAGE Publications' preprint server, Advance, and how one size does not fit all (since SAGE processes journals from different societies, of different sizes, and of different subject matters). Similar to ChemRxiv, SAGE's preprint server allows authors the option to easily submit to a journal after submitting a preprint. Some questions that remain include how to handle citations, whether it takes readers away from peer-reviewed journals, how to ensure that plagiarism-detection software does not flag preprints, and whether double-blind peer review is discredited by reviewers being able to see who wrote the preprint. Although there were different reactions from the editors that SAGE reached out to, most eventually came around to the idea. SAGE is now updating their guidelines and systems, refining their policies, and educating others to adapt to the introduction of Advance.

Finally, Laura Remis discussed American Association for the Advancement of Science's (AAAS's) policy on preprint servers, bioRxiv, and the arguments for and against preprints. Some of the common arguments for preprints include: it engages the scientific community, it shortens time-to-publication, it helps scientists obtain funding, and it fosters collaboration. Some arguments against preprints include: the fear of ideas being "scooped," the possibility of decreased quality, a decline in submissions to peer-reviewed journals, and issues with press releases on "new" information (which may have, in fact, already been disseminated online). Academics, funders, and journals are all (mostly) in agreement that preprints can serve the scientific community, but that peer-reviewed products still have value.

In a brief Q&A, someone brought up how comments on preprints can affect peer review. This can either foster positive communication or hinder the peer-review process, depending on how it is used. There was also some more discussion about plagiarism-detection software. Lots of questions still remain, but overall it appears that preprint servers will be a big part of the future of science publishing.