Editorial

Citation of Two Retracted Papers Shows Both the Impact Advantage and an Unintended Consequence of Open Access

Shu-Kun Lin and Derek J. McPhee

Molecular Diversity Preservation International (MDPI), Matthaeusstrasse 11, Basel CH-4057, Switzerland; Tel. ++41 79 322 3379, Fax: ++41 61 302 8918, E-mails: lin@mdpi.org, mcphee@mdpi.org; http://www.mdpi.org/lin

Received: 16 September 2007 / Published: 19 September 2007

Recently we have observed and commented on the negative effect of non-Open Access (non-OA) papers published in 2005 on the impact factors of the MDPI journals Molecules and International Journal of Molecular Sciences [1]. Since the end of 2006 we have ceased non-OA publishing and now publish only in Open Access form. We feel that this full Open Access publishing policy has been welcomed by authors, as reflected by the greatly increased number of papers submitted and published in 2007 [2].

Another interesting phenomenon, which simultaneously reveals in a powerful fashion both the advantages of Open Access publication and an unintended downside, has been noted in the cases of two withdrawn Molecules papers [3a, 4a]. Briefly, the circumstances are that these two papers were never cited by other authors when they were published in a traditional non-OA format [3b, 4b], but since their Open Access release, and even when withdrawn, they have been cited by other authors, perhaps not too careful about checking their sources (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Times cited by other chemists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[3a]</td>
<td>Withdrawn Open Access Molecules paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[3a]</td>
<td>3 [5]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[4a]</td>
<td>2 [6]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* citation numbers according to Web of Science, recorded on 16 September 2007.

In addition to these two cases of self-plagiarism [7], very recently a case of more obvious plagiarism was brought to our attention by an alert reader [8]. We feel that this is another benefit of Open Access – papers are subject to the scrutiny of many more readers and therefore potential...
unethical behavior like plagiarism is easier to detect. The same reasoning applies to factual errors [9].

While gratified by this impact power of Open Access (and somewhat amused by the unintended outcome), we have decided to henceforth add a watermark to the original PDF files of withdrawn papers, clearly identifying their status, in order to hopefully prevent further citation of such papers, as we feel that it would be unfair to not do so if a withdrawn OA paper were to be cited, potentially benefiting its author(s), while an original paper published in another language or a more obscure journal and in non-OA form were not cited appropriately.

As always, we welcome our reader’s opinions on these matters [10]. Messages with a suitable Subject header should be sent to lin@mdpi.org.

References and Notes


10. For more information, visit the www.mdpi.org/oaj-supports.htm website.

© 2007 by Molecular Diversity Preservation International (MDPI).