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BioScience®

A Forum for Integrating the Life Sciences

American Institute of Biological Sciences

Editorial Boards Must Be Internationally Representative

The United States continues to produce the largest number of scientific papers per year. However, on a per capita basis, several northern European countries top the list, and China's scientific output is increasing in both number and quality each year. Science is a global enterprise, and collaboration across institutional and international boundaries continues to grow "at an astonishing rate" (<https://phys.org/news/2017-02-international-science-collaboration-astonishing.html>). Indeed, the specter of global warming underscores the need for not only transdisciplinary research but also transcontinental collaboration. But important questions exist as to whether the research community is well positioned—geographically speaking—to carry out the task. The majority of researchers live in the wealthy global North, near highly ranked universities but far from the populations in developing nations that are likely to suffer the most from global environmental change. Such mismatches create numerous problems for research, often resulting in inadequate knowledge about the most pressing environmental problems. But inequity is not constrained to the research arena; rather, it extends to academic publication as well, with similar patterns emerging in the scientific literature. In a 2016 article published in *BioScience*, Livingston and colleagues (<https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biv175>) pointed to an alarming paucity of articles from countries with low human development index (HDI) scores. They also highlighted that the problem grows even worse as one climbs the editorial ladder: Editorial boards were even less likely to contain the names of residents of low-HDI countries than bylines were.

To this end, a recent study published by Johanna Espin and colleagues in *PLOS Biology* (<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2002760>) serves as a clarion call for change. The authors found that over two-thirds of environmental journals' associate editors live in the United States or the United Kingdom—and that indices of geographic diversity among editors have remained virtually unchanged since the 1980s. The authors point to "compelling evidence that the region in which authors are based affects where their papers are ultimately published and how much they are cited." Their proposed solution is straightforward: Reform editorial boards to bring international representation in line with research needs and priorities. To some extent, this downplays the fact that editorial board members living in the United States or United Kingdom may hail from developing countries, but the point is well taken nevertheless. Although *BioScience* was not one of the journals surveyed by Espin and colleagues, their critique still applies. The challenge of reforming editorial boards is especially urgent in light of the deep vulnerability of developing, non-Northern countries to the threats posed by global environmental change (www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/). *BioScience* will help take up that challenge. Our future editorial appointments will be carefully scrutinized, with an eye to a simple fact: A more equitable global distribution of editorial effort will be a boon not only to researchers but also to the research enterprise itself. Although improving international representation on editorial boards will not solve the problem of misplaced research effort, it may provide a needed boost to the research efforts of those in geographically underrepresented areas.

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