publons

PEER VIEWS: STORIES FROM THE PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF PEER REVIEW

Name Daniel Himmelstein
publons.com/a/281119/

Current position
Data scientist and Postdoctoral Fellow, Greene Lab (Casey Greene's Laboratory for Integrative Genomics), University of Pennsylvania.

Area of expertise
Understanding human disease through data integration.

No. of reviews
6 (since 2014)

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF?

My research aims to understand human disease through data integration. Specifically, I'm interested in combining all biological knowledge into a single network. Currently, we've integrated knowledge from millions of studies over the last half century into Hetionet and applied this resource to predict new uses for existing drugs.

HOW DOES PEER REVIEW HELP ADVANCE SCIENCE AND HOW DOES PUBLONS FIT INTO THIS PICTURE?

Peer review is a foundation of science. Unfortunately, the current peer review system is severely broken. Busy scientists provide anonymous reviews without credit or pay. Since most reviews are never made public, it's hard to place pride in your reviews. Given the slow pace of publishing and long time between rounds of review, the conversation between reviewers and authors takes a back stage.

Furthermore, reviews are provided after a work is complete rather than throughout the course of the study when feedback is most actionable. One final issue is that process is irreproducible: with only a few reviewers per paper, the outcome is highly dependent on the selection of reviewers.

To help overcome these obstacles to effective peer review, I've taken some personal steps. I began using Publons, which helps reviewers get credit for their work and makes the review system more transparent. While Publons itself doesn't guarantee open review (where review content is made public), it at least provides a path for open review where journals/authors select their openness policy.

Through platforms such as GitHub and Thinklab, I try to solicit and provide as much real-time feedback as possible. While Publons currently focuses on article reviews, I envision a possible future where the platform expands to encompass more incremental forms of feedback.

Finally, I have a few other policies pertaining to review: I sign all my reviews; I only review for open access articles; and I give a strong preference to journals that support open review. Disclaimer: I reserve the right to violate these policies, but have complied up to now.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR EARLY CAREER SCIENTISTS WHO ARE INTERESTED IN REVIEWING?

Publons is a fantastic service for early career researchers.

It's a great way to establish your credibility as a trusted voice in the community. Additionally with the competitive reality of modern science, early career scientists benefit from making their contributions immediately available and recognizable.

"One issue for aspiring reviewers is getting invited to interesting review opportunities."

Here's an area where your PI or mentors can assist.

For three of my reviews, Dr. Greene was asked to review, but instead referred the editor to me and offered to look over my review. As a result, I was the official reviewer and could get Publons credit, while benefitting from the oversight of a seasoned reviewer.

The supervision helped me become accustom the etiquette of peer review. For example, I learned that reviewers should not include their recommended decision in the comments to authors, but rather communicate this information directly to the editor.

Profile Photo by Steve Babuljak.
--
Thanks Daniel for joining in on the conversation about Peer Review.