Nature journal to begin offering double-blind peer review

February 23 2015, by Bob Yirka

Well known and respected journal, *Nature*, will begin next month offering researchers who submit their work for peer review, the option of having it done via the double-blind method—whereby both submitters and reviewers names are kept anonymous. In an Announcement piece, the journal explains why it has chosen to take this step and what it hopes to achieve by doing so.

Up till now, the peer review process at *Nature* has been conducted in single-blind fashion—reviewers could see the names of the authors of the work, but the authors (and everyone else) were not able to see the names of the reviewers. As Nature points out, there have been many calls in the science community for changing the system over the course of the past few years because of a perceived bias by reviewers—due to

gender for example, or reputation.

Single-blind reviews have become the norm for two main reasons; the first is because of the perception that reviewers would be hesitant to be completely honest in their reviews if they know ahead of time that their names will be attached to their work. The second is because of hesitancy on the part of respected journals to offer a service that they do not believe they can fully ensure—sometimes, it is not that difficult to figure out who an author is because of the small numbers of people working in a particular field, because they cite themselves or because their work is already so well known. As part of its announcement, *Nature* has said that ensuring the anonymity of researchers going forward will fall to the writers of the papers.

Others have called for open reviews, where the names of both writers and reviewers are printed, but few in the research community seem to be interested in such a scheme. *Nature* claims that double-blind reviews are wanted by researchers—they cite an international study done back in 2009 where 76 percent of researcher respondents indicated that they felt that double-blind reviews were an effective reviewing system.

Nature will allow researchers who prefer to stick with the single-blind system to do so if they prefer, but the default will change over starting at the beginning of March. At this time it is not clear if other major journals will make the switch as well.

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