

Academia opens 'Sessions' to general audience

September 29 2015, by Bob Yirka



Academic social network site *Academia.edu* has opened a feature called 'Sessions' to a general audience after months of testing it with a small group of users. The feature is intended to serve as an avenue for writers of research papers for getting peer feedback before submitting for publishing.

Writing an academic research [paper](#) is difficult, getting peers to read and review it is perhaps even tougher and because of that the process can sometimes take months or even years. On the other hand, many academics attend conferences, where they often sit and listen to another academic read a paper so that audience members can offer [comments](#). In

such a venue, comments are easy to come by, and that is what Academia is attempting to replicate online. In an interview with *Nature*, Academia CEO Richard Price suggests that he and his company have found the necessary ingredients missing from other online paper review sites—the ability to offer annotation, a time constraint and privacy.

Other online review sites, he notes, show the paper to be discussed and then offer a comments section at the bottom—Sessions, on the other hand, offers the paper on the left side of the screen and a comments section on the right that allows viewers to comment and offer annotations on individual sections or even sentences in a way that is apparent to all who read them. Other sites also tend to post papers for an indeterminate amount of time, which allows those who might want to review the paper to put off doing so for as long as they like. Sessions gives reviewers just 20 days to get in and make their comments. And finally, most do not guard the privacy of those making comments, which Price suggests is a deal-breaker for many wishing to participate—comments that can be found via Google or that last a long time, or even forever are a hindrance to commenting. Comments in Sessions are safe from such searches.

The team at Academia has made the process simple and straightforward—someone (who is a member on the site) posts a paper in Sessions and then invites others to come read and review it. After the [review](#) time expires, the paper is removed and the comments are archived in way that is not accessible by search engines.

Price believes the formula will be successful, noting that approximately 6000 people a day are already participating in online reviews, and predicts that number will rise as more become aware of its benefits.

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