

NEWS

Journals prepare for changes as coronavirus interrupts research

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26 MARCH 2020

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As the **coronavirus pandemic disrupts** the work of researchers around the world, academic journals are adjusting their expectations for what and how they publish.

Some editors expect an initial 'boom' in papers as scientists newly blocked from entering their labs find themselves with more time to write, edit and respond to reviews — followed by a longer-term slowdown in work.

At the same time, many scientists who serve as editors and reviewers are managing their own affected labs while tackling changing demands at home, including childcare and remote working.

"Sometimes life takes unexpected turns and changes priorities," says **May Berenbaum**, editor in chief of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*. "We are dedicated to working within the new set of priorities so that enterprise continues and remains reliable, but [are] just asking everyone to be a little more patient than usual."

Closed down our lab **#IMSTEL** till April 6th. There is a cost of shutting down the lab but thanks to all my team for keeping up the hard work on wrapping up manuscripts while we wait... pic.twitter.com/lvMT3XBwWL

— Binata Joddar (@BinataJoddar) **March 23, 2020**

Some teams are shifting their priorities to work that can be done remotely. **Sam Wang**, professor of neuroscience at Princeton University, is changing his lab's focus to data analysis, and to completing review papers the group had long been considering.

"It's important to do experiments, but it's at least as important to stop and pause and reflect and analyze, and think about what those experiments mean," Wang says. "I'm using this time to do that with my laboratory."

Same here. Our institute will be analyzing data that hasn't been looked at yet, revising and writing papers, writing grants, and planning for future ways to celebrate autism acceptance month once it is safe for everyone! **@GW_OVPR @GWtweets**

— GW Autism Institute (@GWautism) **March 19, 2020**

Shifting priorities:

Still, many researchers are struggling to juggle new priorities, such as having to adapt to changing childcare needs and manage labs in transition.

Both options seems nice - but with 2 kids at home, I will send time creating activities to keep them busy and away from screens...

— valerie martin (@martinv75) **March 18, 2020**

To accommodate these pressures, some journal editors, including those at *PNAS*, the *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *Cell* and *Neuron*, are giving authors and reviewers extra time with manuscripts.

"Perhaps waiting another week for a manuscript decision isn't the end of the world, as it might have been," says Berenbaum of *PNAS*. "We have a real end of the world."

Journals are also planning for a possible decrease in submitted papers months from now, as researchers feel the long-term consequences of disruptions to data collection and lab work.

Researcher **David Mandell**, who serves as editor in chief of *Autism*, anticipates that the journal's 17 percent acceptance rate for manuscripts may go up if the number of submissions goes down.

If that happens, he says, he might issue a call for reviews, which would give researchers a chance to continue to publish even while data collection is not possible. The journal also has a backlog of papers that can be published quickly if needed, he says.

"We of course will grant extensions and do whatever we can to support the research community," Mandell says.

Journals adapting:

At the multidisciplinary journal *PNAS*, editors are managing an influx of coronavirus papers while also trying to support researchers from a wide variety of fields.

For papers on coronavirus, the journal has waived the fee normally required to make a paper open access upon publication. It has also created a prominent, easy-to-find collection to help disseminate information relevant to the pandemic.

Most of the coronavirus papers published so far are related to immediate needs such as drug and vaccine development, but the journal also publishes work in the social and psychological sciences. That kind of work could help society cope in the months and years to come, Berenbaum says.

"It's important to work toward finding a solution to this global challenge," she says. "But there's still a need for other science."

Lights off. Experimental lab now closed. Data analysing in full swing
pic.twitter.com/2DXgxCNGqZ

— Hernán López-Schier (@HernocLs) **March 17, 2020**

Within autism research, too, behavioral research can move online and continue, notes **Simon Baron-Cohen**, co-editor in chief of *Molecular Autism*.

"Will the progress of autism research slow down? I don't think so," Baron-Cohen says. "I'm less worried about the impact on autism research and more worried about the impact on people."