

## At a Crossroads: Pub Count

Recently, it seems that there are a growing number of complaints coming out of academia regarding getting work published at good venues and the importance of having a high pub count. In fact, there has been a case of a professor leaving his field of research (<http://www.cs.utah.edu/~michael/leaving.html>) over these issues. He claims in his explanation of why he left that the peer review process is not only fallible but is also corrupt. In addition, he criticizes the importance that many people place on some of the most highly regarded conferences in our field. On top of all this, he also admits to committing some questionable academic practices as a paper reviewer.

I have to admit that I find this statement to be pretty incredible. Publishing in top conferences such as a SIG is very challenging. There is a lot of competition to publish at those venues as papers are submitted to them from researchers all over the world. As such, a lot of pressure is placed on the peer review process. Saying that reviewers have corrupted this process because they are trying to publish their own work, particularly for a SIG, is outright offensive. Reviewing and selecting papers for a large conference is a monstrous task. Reviewers and committee members are the ones that bear this burden by volunteering much of their own time; they deserve a little more respect than having their academic integrity questioned.

Admittedly I can understand to an extent why there are these complaints about publishing. There is a lot of pressure on professors and grad students to publish these days. While it is true that publishing is an important process of being an academic, it appears that many have lost sight of the real reason to publish. A lot of people believe that having a high pub count is critical to getting a good position at a university and for winning grants. While publishing does help in those areas, what is more important for you as an academic is to believe in your work.

The point of being a grad student is being allowed to chase down ideas that are really interesting and important to you. As you continue to research your ideas, you publish your findings to let other people know what you are doing, find others that are interesting in the same area, and to collaborate with others. Publishing papers that are peer reviewed is one of the best methods for communicating your ideas to a field. Getting your work out there is difficult and sometimes requires as much luck as skill. Conferences like to select papers on hot areas because they also have to attract people to attend them. Getting rejections from big venues is okay as long as you still believe in your work; nothing is stopping you from publishing in smaller conferences or journals either.

As a grad student, you should maintain your academic integrity and hold on to the beliefs that you have in your research. If that means publishing less, that is fine; you will be happier with yourself and your work. If that means not going to a “top tier” university for a faculty position, that is also fine. Whipping professors and grad students to publishing in the top conference every year does not lead to quality research. No matter how hard you push your research, it will only move at its own pace. Besides, it is a bit warped to think that you can get a position at a top university straight out of grad school; that

requires a lot more luck than publishing at any conference. In fact, it is not reasonable for any of us to choose where we want to work as it has more to do with availability of positions than the research we do. That is why it is more important to be true to yourself and your work. Getting caught up in pub counts and other bean counting statistics will just make you unhappy and add a lot of stress to your life. I know this column is very ideological but if you do not agree with it then maybe you should start asking yourself why you want to get into academia in the first place. There is no shame in taking a job in industry; the pay is better and you get your weekends off.