

of the published letters of comment; earlier, such citations were included in the text itself and were not countable.

(3) Perhaps most important, one must consider the case of articles that are not counted as 'source' items (for the denominator) in the calculation of IF. These include editorials, book reviews, letters to the editor, and obituaries. Perhaps surprisingly, citations to such 'non-source' articles are counted in the numerator in the IF calculation. For the journals concerned, such items may therefore be taken to represent instances of 'nothing lost, anything gained'. Included in the examples of non-source articles are the numerous short clinical or laboratory study reports published as Letters to the Editor in *The Lancet*, some of which may even be considered as citation classics; a pair^{2,3} in 1993 on non-01 cholera received approximately 200 citations in the next two years.

Some categories of published items originally classified as source articles have been reclassified as non-source. For example, meeting abstracts published in *FASEB Journal* were reclassified as non-source articles from 1988, and the IF for the journal registered a leap from 0.24 in 1988 to 18.3 in 1989. In 1983, *Nature* started publishing Scientific Correspondence which, together with the prestigious News and Views section, now comprises a large repository of citable non-source articles. Many other journals appear to be following these trends. When one compares the number of pages devoted to source articles with those for non-source items, the ratio for *Nature* had more than halved, from 3.5 in January 1977 to 1.6 twenty years later, even though the total number of pages in the journal was virtually unchanged over this period. If nothing else, our findings support the case for a change in the present method of IF calculation, so that citations to source articles alone are counted.

Finally, we have identified a loophole that could allow a less than scrupulous, perhaps obscure, journal to increase its IF from 0.1 to a healthy 2.1, by the mere expedient of adding two spurious self-citations in each of its source articles. Is it possible that this may be happening already?

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Sir— Scientific institutions are increasingly judged on the quality of the journals in which their staff publish papers. Journal quality is usually presented as its impact factor (IF), the number of citations in a given year to papers published in the two previous years, divided by the number of items published in those previous two years (*Journal Citation Reports*, Institute for Scientific Information, 1997).

As veterinary researchers, we sometimes find ourselves searching for possible human angles in our work, so that we might publish in medical journals, which tend to have significantly higher IFs than their veterinary counterparts. But we have spotted a simpler and more effective approach that will allow us to publish in appropriate places and still get high ratings. As an example, *The Veterinary Record* has an IF of about 1, based on approximately 600 citations and 600 papers published in 1995 and 1996. Our institute publishes about 300 papers in two years. Our director need only instruct us all to cite at least two papers from *The Veterinary Record* in every paper we publish from now on, however loose the connection, for the IF to quickly double. *The Veterinary Record* would move from being in the top 40% of journals to being in the top 15%.

We could have an even greater impact on journals that publish fewer papers. For example, if our director applied this policy to *Veterinary Research Communications*, the IF of that journal would increase from less than 1 to more than 6, moving it into the top 3% of journals. If our institute teamed up with two or three others, we could rapidly create a competitor to *Nature*. Unethical, perhaps, but legal and very much in our interest.

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1. Garfield, E. *Science* **178**, 471–479 (1972).
2. Ramamurthy, T. et al. *Lancet* **341**, 703–704 (1993).
3. Albert, T. J. et al. *Lancet* **341**, 704 (1993).

No dirty tricks in merger ballot

Sir— Rex Dalton's article about the proposed merger of the Optical Society of America (OSA) and the International Society of Optical Engineers contains a number of misleading statements (*Nature* **400**, 605; 1999).

Dalton refers to accusations that a recent membership mailing of OSA exemplified "inappropriate leadership tactics". In fact, this half-price membership effort is an annual drive that was offered to all non-members in the society's vast database. No one group or specific out-of-house list was targeted for this mailing, and the inference that this solicitation was made to influence the proposed merger vote is without merit.

Dalton's report of threatened legal action against an unnamed OSA scientist is false. A letter sent by OSA's executive director to the scientist clearly states concern over the unauthorized use of a mailing list, but it does not make a legal threat. The society has traditionally taken a respectful stance regarding paper and electronic-mail

intrusion into the lives of our members and always has acted to protect its mailing lists as an asset of OSA.

The article also leaves the mistaken impression that opponents of the merger have somehow been silenced in this debate. The board of directors and the staff of OSA have worked diligently to ensure that accurate, timely and informative materials were (and are) provided to our members so that they can make an educated decision on the proposed unification. There have been open forums at society meetings, links provided to the opponents' website, all-member communications providing the opponents' views mailed at the society's expense, and a ballot package sent to all eligible voters presenting equally arguments for and against the proposal.

This vote is extremely important to the future of our society — and the field of optics — and every effort has been made to keep the information flow fair and balanced.

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Call a halt to strong-arm tactics over GM crops

Sir— It is surprising that representatives of an organization that is reported to use acts of destructive force to achieve social and political goals are given a forum in *Nature* on the subject of how to restore public trust in science. I refer to the Commentary by Greenpeace's Benny Haerlin and Doug Parr (*Nature* **400**, 499; 1999). One such act is the destructive attack on fields of genetically modified crops by a group that included the head of Greenpeace UK, as reported by *The New York Times* (23 August).

Press accounts indicate that this was only the latest in a series of attacks by Greenpeace and allied organizations. How can we now tell if a future refusal by farmers to grow genetically modified crops will not really be based on fear disguised as conviction instead of genuine conviction?

European political and religious history is replete with groups that have found the use of apparently peaceful propaganda together with the selective use of brute force to be an effective tool to change public opinion. It is sad that this seems to be happening today in Britain.

Haerlin and Parr suggest that the values of society should be paramount in the debates they discuss. This would have been an interesting suggestion to give to Galileo. Is the use of force in civil discussions one of the values they have in mind?

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