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Using Google Scholar Citations to Support the Impact of Scholarly Work

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Athletic training faculty seeking tenure and promotion, or simply undergoing an annual merit review, may need an understanding of the impact of their scholarly work. To that end, citation counts are frequently used as a measure of impact that a journal article has had in a given discipline.[1] As compared to the simple quantity of publications, the number of times a work is cited is often used as an accepted measure of quality of one's contributions.[2]

For quite some time the Thompson Reuters Web of Science was one of few practical ways to obtain citation counts.[1] However, there are now several options for faculty including Elsevier's Scopus Web Site and Google Scholar Citations.[1] With the advent of these new technologies, faculty members now have options for obtaining data on the extent to which their work is cited by others. The purpose of this column is to explain how to use the Google Scholar Citations platform and summarize additional information it provides to an author in addition to citation counts. We will also provide information comparing the aforementioned databases.

Using Google Scholar Citations

In order to use Google Scholar Citations you must first have a Google account. Visit https://accounts.google.com/NewAccount to complete this step. After establishing an account, go to the Google Scholar main page at http://scholar.google.com/. The site will have a "My Citations" link you need to select (the link can be found in the upper right hand corner as of March 5, 2012). You will then sign in to your Google account and follow the steps to enter some preliminary information including your full name, affiliation, and discipline. The next step will include verifying that Google Scholar has located the correct individual and articles you have published (usually by selecting the correct "article group"). In the final step, Google Scholar will present you with the choice to automatically or manually update future articles. Once your information is entered, the citations site will present your profile (See Figure). The profile includes the total number of citations, as well as those from the last 5 years.

Authors can also obtain the number of citations for each article as well as an h-index and an i10-index. The "h-index is the largest number h such that h publications have at least h citations."[3] In the instance with a profile presented in the figure, the recent h-index means that at least 9 publications have been cited at least 9 times since 2007. The i10-index is simply the number of publications with at least 10 citations.

A very interesting feature of Google Scholar Citations is the list of suggested co-authors; essentially, these are individuals who have either cited your research and could potentially be working on similar topics, or who collaborated with you on a study. With this feature, an author can see potential collaborators who share similar interests.

Discussion

As compared to other citation systems, the Google Scholar Citations has some limitations. For example, the average citations per year are not currently provided, nor are the average citations per item. This feature is provided on ISI Web of Science. Each of the aforementioned databases provides quantitatively different citation counts,[1] although one study has shown a positive correlation between the citation counts between Google Scholar Citations and the Thompson Reuters Web of Science.[4]

What is clear is that Google Scholar has both pros and cons (see Jacsó[5] for a summary related to Google Scholar as a search engine), however it presents an easy and useful tool for authors to examine the impact of their work. In an age where faculty need to provide outcomes related not only to teaching, but also to one's scholarly work, citation counts provide one measure to accomplish this.

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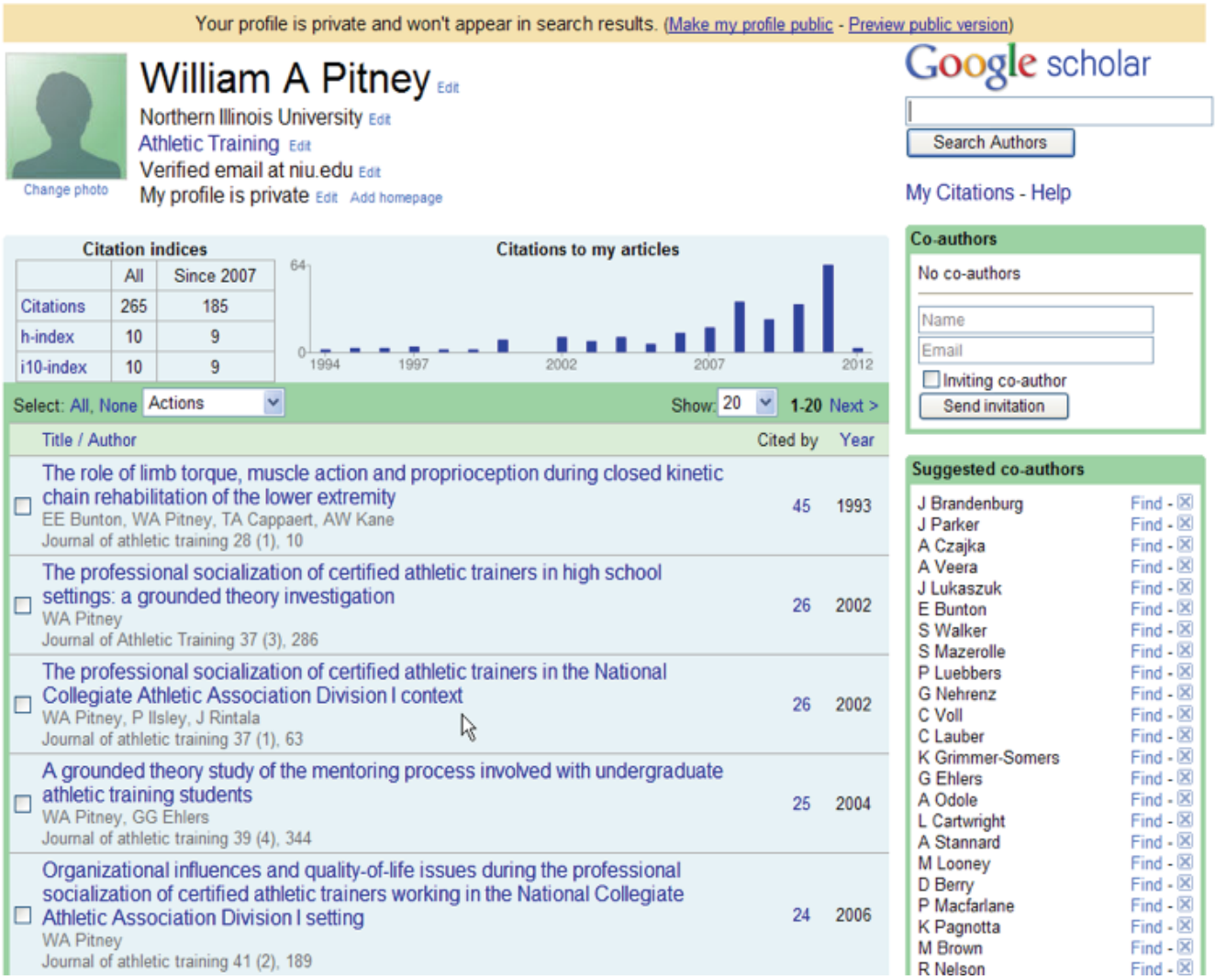

Figure 1. Screen Shot of Google Scholar Citation author profile

We encourage readers to examine the following sources for more dialog related to citation counts:

Ball P. Index aims for fair ranking of scientists. *Nature*. 2005; 436(7053):900.

Opthof T, Wilde AA. The Hirsch-index: a simple, new tool for the assessment of scientific output of individual scientist: the case of Dutch professors in clinical cardiology. *Neth Heart J*. 2009;17(4):145-154.

Petersen AM, Wang F, Stanley HE. Method for measuring the citations and productivity of scientists across time and discipline. *Phys Rev E Stat Nonlin Soft Matter Phys*. 2010;81(3):0361141-0361149.

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2. Lindsey D. Using citation counts as a measure of quality in science: measuring what's measurable rather than what's valid. *Scientometrics*. 1989;15(3):189-203.
3. Citations-Gadget: A Google Scholar Universal Gadget for Scientific Publication Citation Counting. Available: http://code.google.com/p/citations-gadget/ accessed February 28, 2012.
4. Kousha K, Thelwall, M. Google Scholar citations and Google web/url citations: a multi-discipline exploratory analysis. *J Am Soc Inform Science Tech*. 2007;58(7):1055-1065.
5. Jacsó P. Google Scholar: the pros and cons. *Online Inform Rev*. 2005;29(2):208-4527.

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